★★★★★ ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

MARCH 35¢

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

★ Roy Vickers' *Wife Missing*

★ Cornell Woolrich

★ Agatha Christie

★ Thomas Walsh

★ Rufus King

Avram Davidson

Thomas Flanagan

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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The best of the new and the best of the old

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WIFE MISSING

by ROY VICKERS

THE MURDER OF MARION PINnaker ("Mrs. Pin" in the headlines) was a popular mystery, though the Press hated it. Time was an active factor—the mystery grew more mysterious every week merely because the week had passed. After the first fine flare-up, the papers could neither feed it nor kill it.

The mystery had the added charm of simplicity. There was only one popular suspect—her husband. After a preliminary examination, however, the police showed exasperatingly little interest in him. He had the means and the opportunity and it was simple enough to equip him with most of the traditional motives. His peccadilloes could easily be viewed as depravities. On the other hand, his virtues made it easy to see him as the unfortunate victim of slander.

The Pinnakers lived in a detached, six-room house with garden and garage—named "Hillfoot," by grace of a modest slope—in the dormitory suburb of Honshom, which is thirty-two miles out of London. Nearly all the houses are of the same kind and so are the residents—that is, they present a united front of respectability, neighborliness, and adequacy of income.

In such a neighborhood people tend to know each others' affairs, as well as each others' movements. No one had seen Marion leave home at a relevant time. Within forty-eight hours there were whispers that she had not left the house at all and would shortly be found under the floorboards.

Tom Pinnaker, armed with a degree in commerce, had entered Bettinson's to begin at the bottom. In the furniture department he learned upholstery; in the catering department he acquired knowledge of wines and cold storage. He was in a straight line for managerial rank when his father died and he took over a small but steady house agency in central London specializing in the renting of small office suites.

The Pinnakers were a little better off than most of their neighbors because, in the second year of their marriage, Marion inherited twenty thousand pounds. She had placed half with her husband for investment. Although this money loomed large in the case there was

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never anything wrong with Tom Pinnaker's account books. His losses were due strictly to bungling.

The legacy had come as a surprise—at least, to Tom. It had been a marriage of mutual attraction—which is itself a bit of a mystery because their temperaments were so different. Marion was no glamor girl, to stampede a man's judgment. Among the millions who saw her photograph on television, opinion seemed to be divided—which means that she was attractive to some and not to others. Her face suggested a grave young woman who could be gay, but with the gaiety of a family gathering. A domesticated woman, one would say—remembering that domesticity is highly esteemed by many men.

Pinnaker loved his home. He also loved his wife, in his fashion, and was proud of her rigid code of morals: after five years of marriage he would not have changed her for any other kind of woman. Not that he despised all the other kinds. One's character, he told himself, had many facets. There was the facet that had enjoyed fun and games with a business girl in London—doing no harm, he convinced himself, to anybody. And at Honshom there had been—and still was—Freda Culham.

Except for occasional nights in London and sometimes a week-end—attributed to the social demands of clients—his habits were regular: he would never leave home earlier than nine, nor return earlier than six thirty.

Routine was broken on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 5, 1954, when he arrived home a few minutes before three. The official police "narrative" begins with his entering his house at three. But we can profitably go back one hour—to two o'clock, when Mrs. Harker, the domestic help, entered the sitting room to report that she had finished her work and was going home.

Mrs. Pinnaker, she said, was not "dressed"—meaning that she was wearing an overall over skirt and jumper, and house shoes. She was sitting at the writing table handling "funny looking papers" (which turned out to be Bearer Bonds) which she was placing one by one in a small attaché case.

Mrs. Harker was conscientiously rude to anyone in a higher income bracket than her own. When she eventually appeared on television she snapped and snarled at the interviewer, expressed her feelings freely without regard to her briefing, and was a huge popular success. She had a deep regard for Marion.

"You only picked at that grilled sole and I know it was done just as you like it," she grumbled. "To say nothing of the veal cutlets yesterday! And you're thinner than looks healthy. It's not my business, dear,

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but why don't you see a doctor?"

"There's nothing wrong with me, Mrs. Harker." Marion rarely used first names and never called anybody "dear." "I've been advised to—well, to take a sort of holiday."

"Good advice, too! Take it. I'll manage here all right." She noticed a sealed envelope on the television set. "D'you want that letter posted?"

"No, thanks. It's—"

"Then, if there's nothing else, I'll be off."

"Just a minute, Mrs. Harker." From a drawer in the writing table Marion took out a small jeweler's case, opened it, and displayed a diamond brooch. "On your daughter's wedding day—next Saturday, isn't it?—I want you to give her this. That is, if you think she'd like it."

Mrs. Harker protested at the munificence of the gift.

"Don't think about it like that. But if you feel you must, just remind yourself that you've done much more for us than you were paid for. And now you must hurry or you'll miss your bus."

That incident could be interpreted as a kind of farewell; but the important point is that the bus touched its stopping point on schedule, at two twelve, and that Mrs. Harker caught it.

A few minutes later Freda Culham turned up. Instead of leaving her car on the street, as would be usual, she drove up to the garage. A postman happened to notice the car—satisfactorily identified—standing between the kitchen door and the garage, within five minutes of half-past two.

Freda provided a triangle motive for those who felt that the mystery would be incomplete without it—though there is evidence that Tom Pinnaker had no ambition to make Freda his wife. She was the daughter of a professor and the widow of a test pilot who, between them, had left her enough to live by herself in her own house in Honshom. A lively brunette in her middle twenties, with no occupation.

She records that she came in a friendly spirit to admit that she had fallen in love with Tom Pinnaker, to apologize for causing any possible scandal, and to express the hope that she had not given Marion any pain. She may have dressed it up like that, but it is unlikely. She was untroubled with anything resembling a social conscience. To her, marriage meant little more than a formal announcement that you intended to live with somebody until further notice.

The conversation took place in the hall, both women standing. Freda towered over Marion but otherwise was at a disadvantage. Indeed, her friendliness, if any, was wasted on Mrs. Pinnaker.

"I think, Mrs. Culham, you are about to suggest that my husband and I arrange a divorce. I am sorry

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that I cannot agree. For reasons which you would not appreciate I would in no circumstances whatever divorce my husband."

There were arguments by Freda, unanswered by Marion, but our present concern is that Freda had left the house before Tom Pinnaker arrived at three o'clock.

His account of his movements on entering the house has an unusual crispness. He did not claim a mental "blackout" nor any clouding of memory. He said that he entered the house by the kitchen door, shouted that he had come home. Receiving no answer, he went into the sitting room where his eye was caught by an envelope, propped up on the television set. It was addressed *Tom,* in Marion's handwriting. This made him quite certain that Marion had left him. He put the note, unopened, in his pocket. This was not absent-mindedness. He was positive, he said, that he knew the substance of what his wife had written.

At ten past three he was speaking on the telephone to his bank manager in London. That morning he had asked for the loan of one thousand pounds, promising that his wife would provide the necessary collateral.

"Infernal luck—my wife has been called away to a sick relation. I want you to ring James Roden, manager of the branch here. He's secretary of our tennis club and a personal friend—he will confirm my statement to you that my wife has securities of her own to the value of at least ten thousand pounds. Deposited with him."

At three forty the local bank manager, Roden, rang Hillfoot. He first asked for Marion, and was told about the sick relation.

"Look, Pin. I've just had a call from your branch in London. I'm sorry, but I can't help at all."

"That's all right, Jim. I know you can't talk about clients' affairs. But you did not deny that you hold securities of Marion's?"

"I did deny it—I had to! Marion closed her account here yesterday."

These two conversations on the telephone were much quoted as indicating that Pinnaker must have been telling the truth when he asserted that Marion had left the house before three. But those who preferred The Floorboards Theory suggested that, as soon as he came in, he asked her to provide the collateral, that when she refused he lost his temper and killed her, probably without intending to, and that the telephone talks were merely a clever blind.

When Mrs. Harker brought his breakfast tray on the following morning she ignored his greeting and glared at him.

"Is she coming back today?"

"If you mean Mrs. Pinnaker—no. I expect her to be away for at least a fortnight." He sat down and opened the newspaper. "You might get her room done this morning,

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then we can lock it up until she comes back."

"And another thing, sir. You let the furnace out last night. D'you want me to light it?"

"No, thanks. There's no sense in keeping the house heated night and day—I shall be home very little. I'll use the stoves. You can keep warm in the kitchen, can't you?"

Pinnaker had reached the marmalade stage when Mrs. Harker came back for the tray.

"Where has she gone?"

"At the moment, I don't know. She didn't leave word. I expect she'll telephone during the day. What's upsetting you, Mrs. Harker?"

"Her luggage, sir. She didn't take any. You can't count that little attaché case that wouldn't hold any clothes. Her suitcases are in the glory-hole under the stairs. *All* her clothes are in her room. She must have gone out on that bitter day in just an overall and jumper. No furs. No coat. Wearing those blue house shoes with soles like paper."

Pinnaker was unable to suggest an explanation.

"I know what might have happened, Mr. Pinnaker—but I won't say I believe it did."

"Let's have it, Mrs. Harker—straight from the shoulder."

"That old Buick you've been trying to sell. If somebody brought it back again yesterday afternoon she might have got straight in and driven herself away without thinking what she was doing. And small wonder after all she's been through!"

"No, I'm afraid not. I sold the Buick on Monday. That reminds me—I must send a receipt and the log—"

Mrs. Harker then nerved herself to ask the crucial question. Her words crept out in a near whisper.

"What've you done to her?"

"A great deal that I ought not to have done, Mrs. Harker, and I'm ashamed." He was playing for sympathy and getting it. "Most of it was through thoughtlessness, but that's no excuse. As a result, she has left me. I didn't want anybody to know because I hoped she would return in a week or two. I still hope she will. I didn't want you to know, so I tried to dodge your questions. For that I apologize."

"You haven't done *me* any harm. But you must have upset her extra special and driven the poor girl off her head. People must have turned round and stared at her—going out in an overall in January! She may have caught pneumonia and that's why she hasn't telephoned for her clothes. Or had an accident. Or lost her wits. What about asking the police to check the hospitals?"

With some reluctance Pinnaker consented, provided Mrs. Harker would come with him.

"I want you to back me up. Tell them everything you know—espe-

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cially that bit about her not taking any of her clothes. Between us we must convince the police that it's not a case of a wife walking off with a lover. They'll pay more attention to you than to me."

The nearest police station was in the town of Kingbiton, four miles Londonward. Pinnaker gave a brief outline to the superintendent —not mentioning the clothes—then left Mrs. Harker with him and drove on to his office.

Mrs. Harker returned by bus and put in a couple of hours' work at Hillfoot. In that time she thoroughly cleaned and tidied Marion's bedroom. Before she left at two o'clock she had answered one caller in person and four inquiries by telephone. In sum, she told the neighborhood that she did not know where Mrs. Pinnaker had gone, how long she would be away, nor when she had left. These statements met and clashed with the bank manager's information about a sick relation.

In the early evening there were more inquiries, some containing a trap, in which Pinnaker was invariably caught.

Kingbiton had forwarded a report to Missing Persons, Scotland Yard. By midday on Thursday they had picked up the local gossip which tended to feature Freda Culham. But it was the sudden closing of Marion's banking account that brought Chief Inspector Karslake to Hillfoot on Friday morning. Adding Mrs. Harker's testimony of Marion Pinnaker leaving home in an overall and house shoes, Karslake was ready to explore the possibilities of The Floorboards Theory.

Karslake was invited to the most comfortable chair, nearest the electric stove. He was using his frank approach which was so often successful, perhaps because the frankness was genuine.

"It all adds up to what my missis would call queer goings-on. You've given contradictory explanations to different persons. We don't care tuppence about that. At this minute we're starting from scratch. Your wife disappeared on the afternoon of Tuesday the fifth. Will you begin there?"

"I'll have to start a bit further back." Pinnaker was rising to the occasion. "My wife and I had differences, but I did not want to break up. Let it be granted—I don't admit it, you understand—but let it be granted that I had given her cause to divorce me. She was very upset about it. Her religious views prevent her from entertaining the idea of divorce. In a nutshell, she said that she intended to desert me for the statutory three years. At the end of that time I could divorce her if I wished. If I preferred to resume our married life she would have had the three years in which to decide whether she would wish to do so."

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"Plenty of others have done that," commented Karslake. "But she didn't have to run away and hide. It's legal desertion if she simply refuses to live under the same roof."

"She knew all that—she's a very knowledgeable woman. She insisted that it must be a genuine desertion, not a mere legal formula. She said she would go away in such a manner that I would not be able to find her. Her angle is that she has an inner need to change her way of living—sort of go into cold storage for three years. I knew it would be very awkward for me. For one thing, our financial arrangements are interlocked—"

"But why did she have to sneak out of the house? Without a change of clothes. Without even an overcoat."

"I just can't make it sound sensible!" Pinnaker was being frank, too.

"Any witnesses to the desertion story?"

"N-no—unless you count Marion herself as a witness." From his pocket case he produced the envelope addressed *Tom*. "I found it on the TV set when I came home that afternoon."

"The flap is stuck down," snapped Karslake.

"Yes—yes, it is!" Pinnaker was apologetic. "I may seem rather callous, but the fact is I had other things to attend to at the time and it slipped my memory. Perhaps you would prefer to open it?"

Slipped his memory! A bit offbeat, thought Karslake, as he thumbed the envelope open.

"'Dear Tom,'" he read aloud. "'At your request, I hereby put on record that I intend to desert you, in the moral as well as the legal sense, for the statutory period of three years. During that time I shall not communicate with you and shall make it impossible for you to communicate with me.'"

Karslake looked up. "That confirms her intention to desert you," he admitted.

"The next bit is more important, at the moment," said Pinnaker.

"'I cannot take seriously,'" read Karslake, "'your suggestion that you might be accused of murdering me. If such a fantastic thing were to happen, I would be certain to hear of it and you cannot believe that I would remain in seclusion and allow you to be convicted. Marion Pinnaker.'"

Karslake asked the obvious question: "Did you dictate this letter?"

"I didn't actually dictate it. I wrote out the first paragraph for her, but I only made a note about the murder stuff. As a matter of fact, I added a bit about there being no ill-feeling on either side. I wish she had put that in."

Karslake blinked. Here was a frankness of heroic proportions. He studied the handwriting. It might be genuine. Pinnaker's tale might be true. In fact—a few hours later—the science department re-

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ported that the letter had not been forged.

"This letter," said Karslake, "answers all the questions before I've asked 'em. And tidies up all the loose ends—why she put all her money into Bearer Bonds, why she slipped away without anyone seeing her, why she took no clothes, not wanting to be traced through her luggage."

"Yes," said Pinnaker reflectively. "I think it does cover everything."

"Everything *except*—" Karslake reached for the ashtray "—when and how she left this house."

"Is that so important, Inspector?"

"Between you and me, Mr. Pinnaker, I don't suppose it matters a damn." Karslake laughed and Pinnaker laughed too. "But as you probably know, we work by formula in these cases. Missing Wife. First thing: Has the husband salted her away under the floorboards? Yes or No. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I do," admitted Pinnaker. "That's why I got her to write that letter." He was already opening a door. "This house has an attic—you don't want to go up there, do you?"

"It's in the book," smiled Karslake. "Work downwards from roof to foundations."

The attics were a feature of these houses, as they were often required as extra rooms. On the upper landing Pinnaker stopped at a cupboard-like structure.

"Good lord, it's cold up here!" Pinnaker shivered. "I'm not sure I know how to work this thing. I've only been up there once—the week we moved in. We use the attic only for storage."

Karslake found the lever which opened the cupboard, whereupon a fanciful stepladder clanged into position. Pinnaker went up and opened the trapdoor. Karslake followed. Conspicuous among a litter of household articles were two cabin trunks and three old suitcases, all of which proved to be empty.

Back on the upper landing they contemplated five doors.

"The bathroom. The etcetera. And this is the guest room."

Karslake's eye was drawn to the bed by a gaudy coverlet barely covering the mattress which was evidently too big for it. When he went to the curtained recess he noticed an electric cord leading from an outlet in the wall to the mattress itself.

"The Allwhen mattress," Pinnaker remarked. "See that flex? It heats the mattress in winter. Nothing new in that. But look at this switch. Turn it to 'C' and a thermal unit draws out the air between the springs. Ventilates it: uses heat to make you cooler."

He whipped off the coverlet, laid himself full length on the bed, and would have expounded the hygienics of sleep if Karslake had been willing to listen.

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The next room was smaller.

"Dressing room," said Pinnaker. "I'm sleeping in it now."

Pinnaker produced a bedroom key and unlocked the next door.

"This is—was—our—her room."

Karslake noted twin beds stripped of bedclothes. Each was equipped with an Allwhen mattress, wired to a double outlet between the beds. He examined a wardrobe, a built-in cupboard, and a curtained corner, all containing clothes. As he flicked the curtain back, the draught dislodged a folded sheet of paper which had been lying flush with the skirting board.

"Looks like a bill," said Pinnaker.

"It's a railway ticket—bought on January second from an agent in Kingbiton—from Honshom to York, via London, first class. Journey dated for January fifth—last Tuesday. What d'you make of that, Mr. Pinnaker?"

"That she had planned beforehand to leave here on the Tuesday," answered Pinnaker. "But she cannot have planned to start at Honshom station in an overall and house shoes. Something went wrong with her plans. I can't understand it."

"Neither do I," said Karslake. "Anyway, she didn't go near Honshom station—we've checked."

Pinnaker relocked the door before following the Inspector down the stairs.

"The sitting room you've seen. This is the dining room. The other is what we call my study. And there's the kitchen and scullery."

Karslake took the two living rooms first. In the kitchen he opened the cupboards, looked about, hesitated, then went through the scullery to the outhouse. The garden had been examined in Pinnaker's absence.

Back in the kitchen, Karslake pointed at the floor in the direction of the window: "What's that?"

"I can't see what you're pointing at."

Karslake strode forward, then folded back the linoleum which was loose.

"Dammit, Inspector!" Pinnaker laughed grimly. "When you talked about putting wives under floorboards I thought you were joking."

"So I was," said Karslake. "I didn't know then that these boards had been taken up. Look at that nail there—and this one."

"Oh, yes, I remember now!" exclaimed Pinnaker. "A little while ago we had a scare about dry rot."

"Good enough," said Karslake. "We'll check on the dry rot."

He went to the front door and whistled. Three men got out of the police car, one carrying a tool bag and the other a pick and spade.

Very shortly, Karslake joined Pinnaker in the sitting room.

"It'll take them about half an

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hour. While we're waiting, you and I can pick up the loose ends."

Again the two men sat amicably by the stove. Karslake put a number of routine questions, watching Pinnaker for signs of strain. The answers were satisfactory, although Pinnaker invariably was unable to offer a witness.

"After you found your wife gone on Tuesday afternoon, did you leave the house before Wednesday morning?"

"Yes. And here at last I happen to have a witness—or rather, collateral evidence." Pinnaker passed an official-looking paper. "I found this waiting when I got home this evening. Summons for parking without lights at ten thirty that night—Tuesday, January fifth—at Shoreham. The Association will represent me and pay the fine."

"Shoreham-*on-Sea*?" asked Karslake. "What might you have been doing at the seaside in the middle of a cold winter's night?"

"I don't know. I think I went there with the idea of—of drowning myself—"

He broke off as one of Karslake's men knocked and entered.

"No dry rot, sir. And nothing else. The whole area is undisturbed."

"If I may butt in, Inspector," said Pinnaker, "would your staff be kind enough to put everything back? Mrs. Harker is a fussy customer."

"That's all right—we're all house-trained." When they were alone Karslake added, "You were telling me what you did at Shoreham-on-Sea."

Pinnaker looked unhappy.

"Forgive me, Inspector, but this does strike me as rather nightmarish. Floorboards are out of it, so we jump into my car and drive into a jungle of revolting possibilities. Did I hide my wife's body in the car? Did I dump my unhappy wife in the sea? If so the currents will probably bring her back, though we can't be certain about it, can we? In the hours of darkness I could have covered a large slice of country, couldn't I? The Sussex Downs, for instance—there are lots of dull corners no one ever visits. In Surrey, in the unbuilt parts of the Wey valley, there are innumerable, meaningless little ponds. Hampshire and Bucks are pockmarked with abandoned gravel pits. There are probably at least a hundred disused wells within fifty miles of this house—any one of which I might have used, mightn't I? I mean, your checking technique can hardly cover all that territory, can it?"

"Give the poor old technique a chance." Karslake was not amused. "You tell me where you went in your car that night and I'll do my best to check it."

Pinnaker shook his head.

"Sorry, Inspector! I sincerely thank you for doing an unpleasant job in a thoroughly pleasant

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way. But, honestly, I've had enough of it. I propose to settle the whole matter myself by getting in touch with my wife."

"That certainly would settle it," admitted Karslake. "You think you can find her without our help?"

"*With* the help you've already given," corrected Pinnaker. "I'm sure I could interest a newspaper in this garish incident of the floorboards. And all that checking. And my journey after dark in the car. It will be clear to Marion that I am under suspicion and I am confident she will keep her word and come forward."

This chronicle can give no more than the barest outline of the publicity campaign, which stands by itself in the history of crime reporting. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that a man, suspected of murder, voluntarily discarded the protection afforded him by the law. Pinnaker told a conference of reporters that he wanted his wife to know that he was suspected of having murdered her. So he authorized them all to work up the facts in his disfavor and color them with the strong suggestion of guilt. He cooperated generously, even refusing payment for his services.

In an open letter to Marion—front page, center—Pinnaker wrote: "After the police had torn up the floorboards in the kitchen and searched the foundations to see if I had buried you in the manner of Crippen, they asked *me*—very fairly—to account for a 'journey' in the car during the hours of darkness. It was no journey, Marion. It was a melancholy escape from the loneliness of what had been our home. I can remember only that I drove to the sea—I hardly know why. Everything else is a blank. There are many who believe that I threw your dead body into the sea, or disposed of it somewhere in the countryside."

That may be taken as typical of the directly personal appeal he made in print and on the air. There was always just a touch of resentment in references to the floorboards incident. The rest was extremely fair-minded. The journey by night was the main feature. The sea would be dragged in, rather vaguely, without mention of Shoreham—emphasis being on the gravel pits and the disused wells. And always the moral was rubbed in—that there was such a cogent *prima facie* case against Pinnaker that it was Marion's duty to come forward, and alternatively the duty of anyone who had seen her to report to the police.

On Sunday the first sightseers came to gape at Hillfoot and wander into the garden, whereupon Pinnaker was given a police guard. The only personal friend to seek admittance was Freda Culham.

"This is wonderful of you—I

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shall never forget it!" exclaimed Pinnaker. "But I wish you had thought of yourself for once. The scandalmongers will make the most of your coming here."

"Darling! I'm in the scandal up to my neck. I'm The Other Woman in the Case—didn't you know? So let's be scandalous in comfort!"

"For one thing," persisted Pinnaker, "we should both feel rather awkward if Marion were to walk in while you're here."

There was a long silence before Freda said, "Tom! On that Tuesday afternoon I was in this house with Marion until about a quarter to three."

"Good *lord!*" It was the first Pinnaker had heard of it. "She must have rushed out of the house as soon as you had left. Do the police know you were here?"

"I don't think anyone knows. I drove in and parked near the garage." She then described her talk with Marion.

"A quarter to three!" exclaimed Pinnaker. "And yet you stand by me! Just like you—you refuse to believe that I killed her!"

She came close, put her hands on his shoulders. Perhaps at this moment it occurred to him that Freda was one of those women who make excellent mistresses but impossible wives.

"It would be all the same if I did believe you had killed her. She was playing dog-in-the-manger and deserved it. I hated her."

"You don't mean that, Freda—not if I killed Marion!"

"Of course I mean it, silly boy! I don't know how soon we can get married, and it doesn't matter. When all this has blown over—"

"If you don't stop, I shall be sick." He pushed her away. "It's a perfectly revolting idea!"

The quarrel developed on conventional lines, leading to the conventional threat.

"It's the first time I've been thrown down, Tom, and it hurts. Aren't you afraid I might hit back?"

"No, darling." He laughed humorlessly. "Tell the police you were alone in the house with Marion—that she refused your demand for divorce and made you angry—a big strong woman like you who could tuck *her* under your arm. Tell them your car was parked next to the kitchen door. Tell them you left a few minutes before I entered the empty house."

She was so frightened that he had to water it down.

"I am only warning you that people may think you took her away in *your* car. It fits the facts. I am not suggesting you killed her—it's not your style. Besides, Marion is sure to come forward—probably tomorrow, certainly during the week."

But Marion did not come forward during the week—nor the week after.

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Pinnaker, the home-lover, adapted his habits to circumstance. His attempt to economize on fuel was abandoned after three days and the house was nearly as comfortable as ever, thanks to Mrs. Harker.

In the third week the publicity simmered down. Then, uninvited, he called on Karslake at Scotland Yard.

Karslake was not very genial.

"The ballyhoo has not produced your wife, Mr. Pinnaker."

"It has been a disappointment," confessed Pinnaker, "a humiliation! Some of my neighbors are cutting me. I shall have to resign from the committee of the tennis club. But I shall have one more try—on my own."

Karslake showed no curiosity.

"The newspapers," continued Pinnaker, "have written themselves dry—they have no new facts. Marion has not responded to facts. But she may respond to—sentiment. It was suggested to me that I should write a book—a history of our marriage and an appeal to Marion to return. Under the title *Marion, Come Back*. What do you think of the idea?"

Karslake almost growled. "The only advice I can give you, Mr. Pinnaker, is this: if you think of changing your address, be sure to let us know well in advance."

"There won't be any change of address. I shall have to stay in Honshom and live down the feeling against me—for the full period of three years. After all, my wife promised to come forward if I were in danger of *conviction*. Subject, of course, to your correction, Inspector—I am *not* in danger of conviction."

He was in no danger of conviction on the facts possessed by the police. In the next couple of months no new facts emerged, and the files subsided into the Department of Dead Ends . . .

The Department of Dead Ends could reopen a case only at a tangent—when a ripple from one crime intersected the ripple from another. In May 1955—sixteen months after Marion Pinnaker's disappearance—Detective Inspector Rason was investigating a case of suspected arson in which, among many other things, an old Buick car had been burned out. The car's log had been burned too, but he was informed that the car had been bought second-hand from a Mr. Bellamy, who lived at Shoreham-on-Sea.

Mr. Bellamy confirmed the sale and added, "I myself bought it second-hand—from a man named Pinnaker. The man who was supposed to have murdered his wife. You remember? Just about the time it all happened, too."

That, thought Rason, was the sort of remark that often led to business. He went through the files of the Pinnaker case. The car

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sequence showed Pinnaker's admission of the drive by night—to Shoreham-on-Sea. Checked by Karslake on the summons for parking. Checked that the number of the car on the summons was that of a Buick car owned by Pinnaker. That tidied that up. What a pity!

Rason was putting the file away when he remembered to check the license numbers himself.

Number of the Buick car checked by Karslake: PGP 421. Number of the burned out Buick: PGP 421. The same car!

Nothing in that, thought Rason gloomily. Coincidence that Pinnaker should have happened to drive to Shoreham-on-Sea. Perhaps to clinch the sale of the car to Bellamy? In which case Bellamy might be able to throw some light on Pinnaker's movements that night. Just worth a ring on the chance of showing Chief Inspector Karslake he had missed something.

"Mr. Bellamy, sorry to trouble you again. On the night of Tuesday, January fifth, 1954, did Mr. Pinnaker drive in that Buick to see you at Shoreham?"

"No. I don't think he knows I live here—I dealt with him at his office. Anyhow, he couldn't have driven anywhere in that car on the Tuesday because he delivered it to me the previous day—Monday, the fourth."

Rason perceived only that there had been a tangle of dates.

"One more question if you don't mind, Mr. Bellamy. Did you have any trouble with the police over parking without lights that Tuesday night?—the fifth of January."

"It's funny you should ask. I did park without lights. And when I was going home I saw a chit fixed on the wiper, warning me that I would be reported. But I never got the summons. It just occurs to me, Mr. Rason, that Pinnaker may have got that summons. He delivered the car on Monday but I didn't receive the log from him until the Thursday, so the registration was still in his name."

Rason thanked him effusively. Already he was making wild guesses, all pivoting on his mental pictures of Freda Culham, Mrs. Harker, and Pinnaker himself, none of whom he had ever seen. He called at Pinnaker's office, posing as a prospective client. He was disappointed when he visited Freda Culham, who didn't seem to believe that he had once studied under her late father. And Mrs. Harker was very rude to him but unwittingly propped up the juiciest of his guesses.

The next step was to obtain Chief Inspector Karslake's consent to go ahead—usually a tricky business.

"You've got something there!" said Karslake, when Rason had told him the tale of the "two" cars. "But not very much!" he added in his most deflating style. "Pinnaker

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lied about the night ride. Maybe he didn't leave the house at all that night. That doesn't make him a killer."

"Let's try it the other way round," Rason went on, holding himself in. "You get a tip-off that Pinnaker may have scuppered his wife and buried her at home. You search the house and you find no body. O-kay! You're all smiles and apologies for troubling him. How does he react?"

"He didn't."

"Just so! When you tell Pinnaker he's in the clear, does he say 'cheers!'—like anybody else? No! He says, 'Mr. Karslake, don't be too sure I haven't murdered my wife, just because you found nothing under the floorboards! I went out for a long drive as soon as it was dark. How d'you know I didn't take the body along and dump it?' He didn't use those words but that's what it adds up to. And now we know the midnight ride was a lie!"

"But not necessarily a killer's lie!"

"What's more," persisted Rason, ignoring the interruption, "Pinnaker flashed that parking summons to fake evidence that he had driven to the *seal*"

"It doesn't surprise me as much as you'd think," said Karslake. "Take that letter the wife was supposed to have left behind for him. She wrote it herself, all right. But it was a darned funny letter. And that business about the way she was dressed—going out in winter in her indoor rig—that was darned funny too!"

"Which is the funny bit?" asked Rason.

"That book of his. Story of his married life—might have been almost anybody's married life. Yet it sold a couple of hundred thousand copies. And one of the Sunday papers printed about half of it in bits each week. Must have brought him thousands of pounds. He talks soft, but he's no softie."

Rason had missed the cash angle on the book. It took most of the wind out of his sails.

"Anything else?" asked Karslake.

"Mrs. Harker, for instance," said Rason with his customary irrelevance. "She's what I call a tower of strength. D'you know she nearly sacked herself because Pinnaker wouldn't let her use the furnace to keep the place warm? That was about the time when you made your examination of the house."

"Furnace? There was nothing in the furnace."

"Just so!" chirped Rason. "There was nothing in the furnace—when there ought to've been—*if* you understand me."

"I don't!" snapped Karslake. "One thing at a time! Tie him down on that car story of his and we'll charge him with creating a public mischief by misleading the police."

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Pinnaker was making a very good job of living down the scandal. True, he could not appear at the tennis club, but a minority were ready to pass the time of day at a chance meeting. The police had left him unmolested. He had never been seen with Freda Culham and it was obvious that their friendship had ended. Mrs. Harker stood by him. Some believed that Marion would reappear at the end of the three-year period. His habits were as regular as ever except that he was frequently away from home on week-ends. There were two sides to every question—and so on.

Pinnaker showed no recognition of Rason when the latter gave his name, but he greeted Karslake as an old acquaintance.

The police rarely have a personal animosity against a suspect unless he gives them personal cause. They accepted his offer of a drink. A little small talk passed quietly. Then Rason opened up—and in a manner that shocked his superior.

"A few days ago, Mr. Pinnaker, I talked to a Mr. Bellamy—the man who bought your old Buick. The short of it is we know now that your tale about going out after dark to Shoreham-on-Sea is all punk. You never left the house that night."

Karslake registered unease.

Rason rippled on: "That drive by night! Corpse in the car or *not,* according to taste! What was the idea, Mr. Pinnaker?"

"There was no idea—I told it on the spur of the moment. A childish impulse. And this is where I lose face." He made an appealing gesture which had no effect.

"Listen, please! It was obvious that Mr. Karslake believed me to be innocent of any criminal act. So when he started to search the house I did not take it seriously. To me, it was like a parlor game—'I'll be the Murderer and you be the Detective.' Without any effort, I began to identify myself with all the men who had murdered their wives and hidden their bodies. I tingled with fear. I felt guilty—in the sense that an actor can feel guilty while he is playing a murderer. I got a tremendous thrill out of it."

"Yes, but what about that car story?" pressed Rason.

"Wait! Mr. Karslake and I came downstairs. The whole experience was ending rather tamely—when Mr. Karslake spotted that the floorboards in the kitchen had been taken up recently. I told him about the dry rot—and he did not believe me! Quite suddenly, he saw me as a murderer who had concealed my wife's body under the floorboards. Floorboards, by heaven! Crippen! *Me!* It was wonderful! I had never felt so stimulated in my life. We sat in this room. Mr. Karslake asked me some questions to help him 'build up the

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case'—which I knew would be shattered in half an hour when the men found no body.

"Like a dope addict, I wanted more—and at once. I remembered that summons for parking—I knew it was intended for Bellamy—but I couldn't resist the temptation. With the summons to back up a car story I could go on playing the role of suspected man—living under a hanging sword that could never possibly fall. To you no doubt it sounds silly—perhaps even contemptible. I do not defend myself—and I suppose it's no good apologizing now."

Both Karslake and Rason had dealt with psychopaths who try to get themselves suspected for the sake of the thrill. Their silence encouraged Pinnaker to keep talking.

"My wife disappeared on the Tuesday afternoon, if you remember. By midday on Wednesday, Mrs. Harker's well-meant chatter had alerted half the neighborhood. If there had been a corpse in the house I couldn't possibly have moved it later than Wednesday morning—I couldn't have moved a dead rabbit without everybody knowing. Therefore I had to concentrate suspicion of myself as of that Tuesday evening."

"So it was just a jolly prank," muttered Rason. "Was Mrs. Pinnaker playing, too? That letter she wrote about coming forward if you were in danger? Was that part of the prank?"

"Certainly not!"

"We needn't go into that now," snapped Karslake.

"My superior officer," said Rason, nodding at Karslake, "is more interested in how and when Mrs. Pinnaker left this house. He won't tie you to that tale about her going away dressed in house clothes and nothing else but ten thousand quid in a brief case."

"To the best of my belief that is what she did."

"Come, Mr. Pinnaker! If she was excited or absent-minded she'd have been pulled up by the cold before she reached the gate. And if she was out of her mind and started walking away to nowhere, how far would she get in this suburb where pretty nearly everybody knows her? Dressed like that in January, she'd have been as conspicuous as if she'd been got up as a fan dancer. Yet no one saw her."

"I have nothing to add," said Pinnaker.

"Then I'll add a bit," retorted Rason. "Your wife did *not* leave the house that Tuesday. Something went wrong with your plans. And she didn't leave that Wednesday nor that Thursday nor that Friday. *Your wife was in this house when my superior officer searched it!*"

"You needn't answer that, Mr. Pinnaker," said Karslake. "It's ridiculous!"

Rason grinned at his senior. "Did you look under the beds—sir?"

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Both men stared at him.

"Yes, under the beds!" Rason repeated. "All those jokes about burglars under the bed—as if any burglar would be such a fool! It's such a damn silly place to hide anyone—living or dead—that when you come to think of it, it's rather a good place."

For a moment Karslake was doubtful.

"I was looking for a corpse—"

"And the corpse had to be under the floorboards!" cut in Rason.

"—I wasn't looking for a living woman. Come to that, she could have stayed in the attic while Mrs. Harker was here in the mornings. And dodged about while I was searching the house—"

"Couldn't she though! Let's try it—if Mr. Pinnaker doesn't mind."

Again they began upstairs. On the top landing, the built-in ladder clanged into position and clanged back again when Karslake decided that no woman, however slight, could have remained hidden in the attic.

"She couldn't have dodged from one room while I was in another and slipped up to the attic, because I would have heard that ladder." Glaring at Rason, he added, "If she *was* in that house when I searched it, she must have been in one of the rooms on this landing."

He opened the nearest door, which was that of the guest room.

"There you are! I didn't look under that bed because I can see under it from the doorway."

"Quite right," agreed Rason, himself stepping into the room and examining the bed. "So this is the Allwhen mattress!" He observed the electric cord running from the mattress to an outlet in the wall. "Hot and cold laid on. Mrs. Harker told me about 'em—said they were unhealthy because—"

He was talking to himself. The others had inspected the smaller room and he joined them in the corridor.

"This is the big room," Pinnaker was saying. "It was—our room. It has not been in use since she left." The hint was not taken by Karslake and Pinnaker produced a single key on a pocket chain, then opened the door.

The windows were shut and the room had a disagreeable mustiness. The twin beds were as Karslake had last seen them except for a slight film of dust. Pinnaker was chattering like an anxious host. He observed that Rason's eye was on one of the mattresses.

"That's an Allwhen mattress too. By means of an insulated—"

"Yes, I've been told how they work," interrupted Rason and turned to Karslake.

"You've heard me speak of my niece—"

"Tell Mr. Pinnaker some other time," scowled Karslake.

"She's a fair-sized young woman. I measured her yesterday. Not for roundness—for thickness. Mean-

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ing the highest point of her when she's lying flat on the sitting-room floor. A shade over nine inches, she made."

He strode to the nearer bed, unfolded a pocket rule, and measured the sides of the Allwhen mattress.

"Ten inches thick," he announced. He folded the pocket rule. "Mrs. Pinnaker was a small woman, wasn't she?"

"Five foot three—and slender," answered Pinnaker.

"Small enough to fit easily inside one of these mattresses—in which case Mr. Karslake would probably have missed it, having his mind on floorboards."

"I don't think a skilled eye could be deceived—nor even an unskilled one," said Pinnaker indulgently. "If you remove the springs and the insulation and the cold air conduit, you have little more than a canvas bag. The silhouette of a human being—"

"There'd be no silhouette if she'd been packed in nicely by a skilled upholsterer. When you were a youngster at Bettinson's, Mr. Pinnaker, you learned upholstery, didn't you?"

"True enough," answered Pinnaker. "But the most skilled upholsterer in the world could not prevent a corpse enclosed in such a mattress from declaring its presence after a day or two."

"That's right!" cried Karslake. "If there had been a corpse in one of the mattresses that evening, I couldn't have helped knowing it. But I'll own up I'd have missed a *living* woman!"

"A living woman sewn up in a mattress?" asked Pinnaker.

"Sewn up or buttoned up by a skilled upholsterer an hour before I arrived. That mattress has about a dozen air vents—and you could have prepared it weeks beforehand."

Pinnaker looked thoughtful.

"Physically possible, I suppose," he murmured. "But what on earth *for!* What would be the purpose of such a trick—which, as you say, must have been planned beforehand?"

Karslake answered the question with another.

"How many thousands did you make on that book of yours, Mr. Pinnaker—*Marion, Come Back*?"

Pinnaker caught his breath.

"You used Mrs. Harker pretty smartly," continued Karslake. "You two did some conjuring tricks with those clothes. You gave Mrs. Harker faked evidence. So she told us in good faith that tale about your wife going away in her house clothes—so's you could be dead certain the police would come here and search the house for a corpse. You played up the newspapers and the TV, as you played up Mrs. Harker. And now you're going to tell me that as a result of all that advertisement no one was more surprised than yourself

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when two or three hundred thousand suckers bought that book!"

"Suckers!" echoed Pinnaker. He flushed and his voice revealed an unsuspected aggressiveness. "Let me tell you something! That book may have had its faults from a literary angle. But the public liked it. They bought it—they passed it from hand to hand—and they talked about it. And you have the effrontery to call them *suckers!*"

Rason stepped between them. Karslake regarded Pinnaker with some surprise.

"I apologize for saying 'suckers'," he said coldly. "But you admit that the two of you hoaxed us—as well as the newspapers?"

"Absolute rot!" stormed Pinnaker. Then with sudden calm he continued, as if repeating a prepared statement: "I admit only that I personally misled the police with that car story. I expect to be prosecuted for having caused mischief, or whatever you call it. I deny that my wife helped me in any way whatever. Alternatively, if she did help me, she did so 'under the domination of her husband.' You can't touch her."

"Good enough!" snapped Karslake. "It's your case, Rason. You can take his statement."

When Karslake had left the house Rason rejoined Pinnaker in the sitting room.

"This statement will take some time, won't it?" suggested Pinnaker, producing a portable typewriter. "Shall we have another drink before we start?"

"Not for me, thanks." Rason's tone carried a reminder of more important things. "Never mind the typewriter. What about that furnace of yours? The one that heats the house."

Pinnaker smoothed the hair from his forehead.

"Your senior got my goat, Mr. Rason. I'm finding it hard to concentrate. If you won't join me, d'you mind if I have a drink by myself."

He opened the cocktail cabinet. His back was toward Rason but his face was reflected in a glass panel of the bookcase.

"At the time, Mr. Pinnaker, you were hard pressed for a thousand pounds. Saving a trifle on house fuel wouldn't have helped you. You let the fire out on that Tuesday night. You kept it out during Wednesday and Thursday. But on Friday—after the house had been searched for the dead body of your wife—you lit the fire again and heated the house."

"In a crisis one's small acts are sometimes idiotic." Pinnaker's face showed indifference but Rason was watching his hands, reflected almost as clearly as if the glass panel had been a mirror.

A second later Rason crept up like a cat and snatched the half-filled tumbler of whiskey.

"What's that you dropped in the glass?" Rason demanded.

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"Only a sedative. I told you Karslake had rattled me."

"Then it wouldn't do me any harm." Rason raised the glass to his lips.

"If you drink that it will kill you," said Pinnaker calmly. "I don't think you intend to drink it, but I daren't take the risk."

"Good boy!" said Rason. There was a long silence while he opened his bag, poured the contents of the glass into a small bottle, then shut the bag. "There's not much of the murderer about you, Mr. Pinnaker. When she wouldn't let you have that thousand you lost your temper and dotted her one. Didn't you? I'm just guessing."

"You are! All you've got is that I tried to kill myself," said Pinnaker. "How much do you *know?*"

"Not all of it," admitted Rason. "But I'll tell you what I think happened. You gave her that unlucky wallop on Tuesday afternoon. You put her in the attic, out of Mrs. Harker's way. You kept the house close to freezing for obvious reasons. You had plenty of time to doctor that mattress and get her sewn up inside before the Chief Inspector came on Friday evening. And you messed about with the floorboards, so's he'd be certain to have 'em up. Then everybody would be sure that there was no corpse in the house. Am I right?"

"As there are no witnesses present—yes, you are substantially right." Pinnaker thrust his hands into his pockets as if he did no longer trusted them. "But you still have no evidence. After that Friday, I was able to use my other car without anyone suspecting that it might contain a corpse—and so was able to hide it in the countryside—"

"No good, laddie," interrupted Rason. "The safest place in the world to hide that corpse was the one place where Chief Inspector Karslake had reported that there was no corpse!"

They found, buried under the floorboards, an attaché case containing ten thousand pounds in Bearer Bonds—and the body of Marion Pinnaker, dressed in jumper, skirt, and overall, the thin blue house shoes still on her tiny feet.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS WALSH**

TITLE: ***Dear Lady***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: The Berkshires, New England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For more than 25 years Miss Carolin had taught third grade. For the past 15 years she and Miss Briggs, her best friend, had spent their summers at Pinemount House. And there Miss Carolin met the gentle, courtly Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett.*

IT WAS ALWAYS HIS NAME FOR HER. Never—until the end, at least—did he use any other form of address, never did he call her either Janet or Miss Carolin; and yet when she heard it first, in the lobby at Pinemount House on a sunny and pleasant July morning, it seemed to have no reference to her at all. Still—she didn't know why—something in her gave an absurd, giddy bump. She looked up at him with one of her nervous flutters and made an awkward and meaningless gesture with her right hand. There appeared to have been no mistake, however.

"Your paper, Dear Lady," Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett said, holding it down to her with the tiniest possible flourish. "I picked it up out on the desk—you don't mind, surely?—and took this great liberty."

The salutation, on this first occasion, was absolutely incredible; but somehow, even if the suddenness of it shocked and indeed petrified Miss Carolin, it did not anger her. While a pair of immaculate sports shoes, under her agitated and downcast gaze, wavered from side to side on the tile floor, she managed to indicate rather breathlessly that it had been very kind of him to get her paper; but of

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course he should not have bothered.

"My pleasure," Edmund DeHaven Hartlett assured her, in a deep grave voice, and with his gray flannel trousers crinkling up over each instep in what Miss Carolin felt sure must be a stiff little bow. "My pleasure, Dear Lady. Only too happy to be of service."

She did not answer that—how could she when at any moment Miss Briggs would be down from upstairs for their morning walk? Nor could she bring herself to look any higher than the linen handkerchief in his breast pocket—not, at any rate, until the sports shoes and the gray flannel trousers moved elegantly away from her, with nothing to see over them but slim squared shoulders, a straight back, and iron-gray hair. Of course she knew a few details about Mr. Hartlett, since word passed around very quickly at Pinemount House when a new arrival came in; but all she knew was his name, the fact that he had registered alone, and that he was reported to be a retired businessman from Baltimore, Maryland. Last night, too, after supper, he had held open the dining-room door, very friendly and yet respectful, while she and Miss Briggs had passed before him into the lobby. A gentle, nice-looking man, Miss Carolin had thought then; older than she, but not too old, with exquisite manners, sad brown eyes, and a distinguished and carefully cropped mustache.

She had thanked him in a low murmur because the curt nod Miss Briggs had bestowed on him did not seem at all adequate; and she had decided that in a few days she would say good morning to him in the lobby—smile, nod, perhaps mention the weather. But to be addressed as Dear Lady was—well, simply fantastic. Not quite . . .

The right word did not come. She got up nervously, touching the front of her dress for no reason, with a sense of excited and not altogether unpleasant agitation remaining in her. But perhaps it should not have been there, because Janet Alice Carolin was a tall woman of fifty with an awkward and topheavy figure, fluffed-out brown hair—perhaps just a shade browner than it had any right to be—and an expression of shy but eager-to-please timidity in her short-sighted brown eyes.

Miss Briggs, who never forgot her age and rarely minimized it, often spoke to her of the need for a colder, more dignified reserve. There was, Miss Briggs declared stoutly, no nonsense about *her*—no nonsense at all. But Janet . . . well, Miss Briggs often thought—even after more than twenty-five years of teaching the fourth grade in the same school where Miss Carolin taught the third, even after fifteen years of vacationing together every summer in a respectable and dignified establishment

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like Pinemount House—that there were certain occasions when she just could not bring herself to feel that Miss Carolin had the proper approach either to her profession or to herself.

There was the brown hair, for instance—a little browner every three or four weeks; and of course there was Miss Carolin's bathroom cabinet at home, with its skin creams and lotions and astringents and its—well, simply ridiculous perfumes. Her novels, too; her radio and television programs; her framed portrait of the young Mr. Ronald Colman; her—

"Oh, everything," Miss Briggs said, somewhat waspishly, when they were sitting out in the lobby that evening. "That man, for instance. Or don't you suppose I just saw you smirking at him?"

Smirking? Miss Carolin thought, fluttering helplessly.

"As if," Miss Briggs added in a loud, carrying tone and with the most perfect deliberation, "one has to mingle with that type, even in a public hotel. Oh, no, Janet! Those ingratiating *creatures* I have never been able to endure. Quite militree, aren't I? Old hat, old school, old tie."

She gave utterance to a vulgar and cutting laugh, and most certainly Miss Carolin's cheeks burned. She said nothing, however, since Miss Briggs had always intimidated her; but she discovered for herself the next morning—and beyond all possible doubt—that no one could refer to Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett as forward or pushing, not with any justice.

He happened—just happened and obviously by the merest accident—to stroll into the summerhouse when Miss Carolin was there for one of her dreamy half hours. At once, instinctively, he behaved himself with the nicest tact.

"Oh!" he said. "Are you—so sorry!" halting at once, his thick gray hair glinting in the sunlight, his head up, his hands clasped in soldierly fashion at his back. "No idea of intruding," he said, "no idea at all, Dear Lady. If I have disturbed you—"

Miss Carolin, trying to smile, could only blink at him nervously. No, she said, it was quite all right. He mustn't feel—

But Mr. Hartlett would not be consoled. If he had known she was in here, if he had even suspected . . .

He was very distressed; yet he did not depart immediately. She indicated to him, since it appeared that he had come out here to look for it, the faint glitter of Omega Lake, far below; she picked out Mount Nebo; after a time, and surprisingly for Miss Carolin, she felt quite comfortable with him, altogether at ease.

That was the last week in July.

During the first week in August, inevitably, there were other meet-

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ings. Perhaps just a word or two, or a glance from his fine sad eyes, if Miss Briggs were present; but of course, also inevitably, a longer and freer chat—a stroll together through the grounds on a windless Sunday evening when Miss Briggs was lying down after a bad headache.

It developed that they had many things in common. They felt the same about life and true companionship and music and literature; even—most significant of all—about the poetry corner in the Sunday paper. There was a firm and instantaneous closeness between them. Edmund, she discovered—Mr. Hartlett—was quite alone in the world save for one sister; how good then, and how natural, to confess that she, too, had no one at all but a niece in St. Paul whom she had not seen for years.

Mr. Hartlett—Edmund—thought that at times loneliness could be a bond between people, the right people; because no one could ever know what true loneliness was—no one who hadn't, in some obscure and physical way, shared it with you. That was only the first long meeting. There were others. There was one finally, at dusk, when Miss Briggs came upon them sitting in the summer-house.

Her eyes froze like small and vindictive black marbles. "Excuse *me*!" she said, standing for a moment manfully astride the doorway.

Then she backed off hurriedly, as if outraged by something obscene, while Miss Carolin tried to find something to say; and that night, in the third-floor privacy of the ladies bathroom, Miss Briggs flared out at Miss Carolin with bitter and inexcusable things. Manstruck, she declared shrilly; emptyheaded, absurd, almost pitiable. Did she think for one minute that a creature of his sort—a Mr. Nobody of Nowhere—had anything precious to offer? And Miss Carolin, who had never fought back, never in her life, could only flee blindly, her towel over her arm, her mousy brown eyes bewildered and hurt.

In the morning a stiff and unapproachable Miss Briggs, without any excuse at all, went off to the post office with Mrs. Ambrose Tolliver; and so it may have been only fitting—the perfectly natural thing to expect—that in the afternoon a brightly and yet painfully smiling Miss Carolin did the last inexcusable thing.

She went off for a boat ride, all afternoon, with Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett.

She was not directly addressed at supper, at the corner table she had known for twelve years—not by Miss Briggs, nor by Mrs. Tolliver, nor by Mr. Tolliver. She did not wait for dessert. She rushed upstairs and sat in the dark, listening to the radio and eating chocolate creams and every so often sighing quietly. Indeed, Miss Car-

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olin felt very much put upon. Even the radio programs were not her favorites. There were hillbilly shows and quiz panels and comedians; but nowhere, from top to bottom of the dial, was there a drama that dealt sadly, yet touchingly, with love and parting and unselfish sacrifice.

"Inspector Benson's Case Book," most certainly, was not a story of that sort; it was not, in fact, like any story Miss Carolin had ever heard before. She listened to it dimly at first, through sighs and chocolates. Then something happened in that room—horror came in and winked jovially at her. Inspector Benson introduced it, and Miss Carolin became frozen.

The "Case Book," it appeared, was not made up—not mere crime fiction; the episodes it narrated, with only names changed to avoid embarrassing innocent participants, were all one hundred per cent factual.

These were the Staceys, Inspector Benson announced crisply: a cunning, cold-blooded man; a stout, sleepy-eyed and merciless woman. And their stage? A quiet country farm in Ohio where John Thomas Stacey composed his love letters to various women, no longer young, whose names he had found in a cheap rural magazine called *Lonely Folks' Fireside*. They were foolish, thoughtless women, Inspector Benson pointed out with great bluntness—widows, for the most part, or elderly spinsters—but all naive enough to believe that John Thomas Stacey was exactly what he represented himself to be, a widowed dairy farmer living alone, well off, amiable, and longing for companionship. In the space of six months some of those women—four of them had been traced and identified so far—had come to visit him at his farm.

None of them ever returned home again. But their banks were instructed by mail, and apparently in their own handwriting, to transfer their savings to a bank in Cleveland—to a new account that each writer claimed to have opened there. It was just an everyday matter of business routine. The bankbooks were enclosed; the new accounts were all in the same names as the old; and so there was never anything wrong or even suspicious to the banks at home. It was only a simple transfer of funds—from Jennie Jones in Albany, New York, to Jennie Jones in Cleveland, Ohio.

How could anyone know that it was Mrs. John Thomas Stacey who had opened those new accounts, who was known in half a dozen banks in Cleveland as Jennie Jones or Mary Smith or Olive Harris or Edith May Johnson? It was all quite clear, as Inspector Benson explained it. When anyone opened an account, the bank never requested proof of identity or of the person's right to use any name put down on the

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application. Any name could be given to a bank, any name at all, and ever afterward the bank would unquestionably accept that person under that name. So in Cleveland, in four different banks, Mrs. John Thomas Stacey had established with small initial deposits four different accounts under four different names; and each name was the name of a woman who had last been known to have visited her husband's farm.

None of these women had any close relatives—that was the first thing Stacey had determined about them. And so, naturally, it was months after the accounts had been transferred, after the New York checks had been cleared in Cleveland and all the money withdrawn, that inquiries were first made.

But the Staceys were gone by then. Where? Nobody knew. In their cellar, however, hidden behind old firewood, were found four trunks. And in each trunk . . .

Miss Carolin would have turned off the story, if she had been able to move. She listened dumbly to Inspector Benson's grim warning at the end and to a description not so much of the man—middle-aged, quiet-mannered, anonymous—as of the woman.

A short woman, this Mrs. Stacey, enormously stout, with sleepy-looking black eyes and forearms thicker and stronger than a man's. It brought up a picture of horrible reality, of lifelike vividness and detail, to Miss Carolin. That night in her dreams the woman appeared to be sitting quite close to her, watching her, talking softly and smiling drowsily. There was a man also—but not so vivid, not so clear, just a shadow. Not him, Miss Carolin knew, even in sleep; but that woman. That woman . . .

She woke two or three times during the night, in cold sweat; each time, by seeming to lean close to her, by whispering something soft and terrifying, something abominable, it was the woman who roused her. It was a very bad night for Miss Carolin; in the morning, at breakfast, it was like heaven to have Edmund smiling at her—safe, strong, kindly, immensely reassuring—across the cheerful dining room at Pinemount House.

They spent a wonderful day together—she didn't have to bother with Miss Briggs at all. Never again, she thought happily, never! Because she and Edmund walked down to the village together and in a shop there he bought her his favorite book of poems. *To my Dear Lady,* he inscribed it in swirling penmanship, *for ever and for aye—Edmund.*

Good books, Edmund told her earnestly, were the finest gifts of all; they never wore out or changed fashion or deserted you. They were always there when you wanted them. That was why, when she found a leather-bound copy of *Sonnets From the Portuguese,* one

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which Edmund had handled admiringly, she bought it for him. *With best wishes,* she wrote in that, *and sincere affection—Janet Alice Carolin.*

That was Tuesday. On that Saturday, in the morning mail, Edmund received a Special Delivery letter. Miss Carolin was with him and noticed the sad, troubled look that he tried to hide from her after reading it. She looked timidly at him; he was silent for so long, staring out across the grounds, that at last she could endure it no longer. Not bad news? Miss Carolin hoped. Not anything that would—

"My sister," Edmund said slowly, soberly. He gave a deep sigh. "An invalid, Dear Lady. Her heart. And I'm afraid that this time—"

"Oh, no," Miss Carolin said, deeply distressed. "No, Edmund. I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want you to think such things."

"Unhappy?" Edmund said. He smiled sadly and patted her hand. "I'll go," he said. "I'm afraid I must. But all this, Dear Lady—what I've found here with you, what I must now leave—"

He broke off, as if it was very difficult for him to go on. Excusing himself then, but just touching her hand for another moment, he went into the lobby and put through a long distance phone call. And of course Miss Carolin knew what it meant; her throat felt dry and thick and the ground swam in front of her.

Yes, she said, squeezing her hands together. She understood that he must go. What else? But . . .

"So our paths cross and part," Edmund said. "Cross and part. And my Dear Lady . . ."

That afternoon there were a last few bitter-sweet moments together at the railroad station, with Edmund holding her hands tightly between both of his. More than he could express, he said, he was going to miss his Dear Lady; but his one comfort was that, in actual distance, he would not be too far from her. New Paris was only a bit in the Berkshires—three hours by train. Could he hope, could he venture to dare hope . . .

Miss Carolin fluttered.

"But I'd forgotten," Edmund said, his handsome face shadowed wearily. "Of course. You're with Miss Briggs, and you're not going to leave here until September."

"Miss Briggs!" Miss Carolin said, her voice wavering desperately. "Do you think I'd permit her to stand in my way, Edmund? If there was anything I could do for you, or for your sister—anything—"

She thought of a small white house in a quiet Berkshire village, of tea in delicate china, of a frail woman with a sweet delicate face and gentle, tired eyes.

"Then would you come to us?"

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Edmund said, his face lighting up as the train whistle pierced the placid summer countryside "Would you, my Dear, Dear Lady? Could you?"

Would she? Could she? These were her Edmund's absurd and finicky questions; in a moment, in something that burst around her—like heat, light, fire—they settled it hurriedly, quick question and quicker answer. At last he was on the platform, waving to her. "Then Tuesday!" he cried. "Tuesday!"

That was what she remembered—his look, the touch of his hand. It did not matter that Miss Briggs would never forgive her; it did not matter at all then, or on Tuesday morning. Oddly enough, it was Miss Briggs who broke down, crying softly to herself over in one corner as Miss Carolin strode triumphantly out of Pinemount House, a small vindictiveness in her. Let her guess where I'm going, Miss Carolin thought; because never shall she hear so much as a word from me. Yet in the train Miss Carolin found herself nervous and upset—like a bride, she thought, blushing deeply.

She was—so Edmund had written—to stay with them at least a week—and longer if she wished to. She could see Miss Briggs again in September, in New York; but now . . .

But now, Miss Carolin thought, getting off late that afternoon at New Paris. But now! And then a devastating thing confronted her; there was no car waiting for her, and no Edmund.

She stood on the platform with her two suitcases beside her—a tall, clumsy woman with odd-looking brown hair, too thick, too dark, and too soft for her age, and with her vague brown eyes glancing uncertainly over the town square. Oh dear! she thought. Oh, dear! A little later, in Potter's Drug Store, she sat down at the soda fountain after searching futilely through the telephone book for someone named Hartlett. The sister was married, of course; that was the reason she hadn't found the name. Yet it was strange Edmund had never mentioned it.

She had a cold drink—not because she wanted it but because she was afraid the clerk or Mr. Potter, whoever he was, might resent her just sitting there. "Ten dollars?" he said when she paid him nervously for it. "Ain't you got anything smaller for a ten-cent drink?"

He went to make change, leaving Miss Carolin crushed; and then, getting out of a car near the railroad platform, she saw Edmund. She ran to him, waving breathlessly, all relief now. Dear, dear Edmund! But he just shook her hand hurriedly, almost uneasily, put her bags into the car, and they drove off.

He did not talk much. His sis-

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ter? Oh, fine, fine, much better. How was the trip up? But he did not seem to pay any attention to the answer she gave him; every so often, furtively, his eyes went to the rear-view mirror.

They turned off at last onto a dirt road where trees met overhead and there were thick, dank shadows around. It was not quite the approach she had imagined; and the house—the dreamed-of little cottage in the Berkshires,—was not quite as she had pictured it. It was off by itself, an old house, unpainted, surrounded by a stone wall overgrown by brambles.

"All right," Edmund said, almost rudely. "Get out now. Here we are."

He had stopped in a littered farmyard. Long, cool shadows moved down at them over a wooded rise. And Edmund seemed very strange—angry or worried or upset; he had lost that fine grave sadness she remembered. "Get in, get in," he said, almost yanking her up over a warped porch. "What are you looking around so silly for? What's the matter with you?"

Nothing, Miss Carolin tried to say; oh, nothing, Edmund. But something had begun to wither inside of her. She wished she were back at the Pinemount House; she wished . . .

Edmund opened the front door. "Clara!" he said. "Clara!"

He thrust Miss Carolin inside, into a long narrow hall, very dim, with uneven planks in the floor. There was an oil lamp on the table. He lit it. "Clara!" he called again, angrily, urgently.

He held the lamp up. Another door opened in the back of the hall and in the flickering upward rush of light Miss Carolin saw a white round face, enormous as the full moon, with two wings of dark hair drawn smoothly back from it. It was not a disembodied face; there was a dress under it—a black dress.

"I had a flat on the way in," Edmund said, as impersonally as if Miss Carolin were not there to hear him. "I was late. But thank God she had enough brains to wait for me."

And Miss Carolin, touching her lips nervously, gave a fixed smile to a woman she had never imagined —very short, very plump, very placid, standing there with her hands folded on the black dress and her eyes considering Miss Carolin from hat to shoes.

"Perhaps," Miss Carolin faltered, "perhaps I shouldn't have come. Edmund said you were ill. But I thought—"

"Oh, I'm better," the woman said in a sweet piping voice that could have been a little amused at something, although surely not at Miss Carolin. "I'm much better, thank you. Thank you very much. The parlor, Edmund."

The lamplight flickered away before them, with Edmund holding

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it out, into a room with two windows at the back, a long narrow table, a rocker, a black leather couch, a few chairs, and a worn carpet. The fireplace was blocked off by a brass screen and on the mantel over it there were dim china figures—a shepherd and shepherdess, a Swiss mountaineer, a French lady with an elaborate powdered coiffure. These objects regarded Miss Carolin with frozen contempt. Only the French lady, her head down, her hands holding the skirt up and out, smiled secretly and in rather a jolly way to herself—motionless up there, turned a little from Miss Carolin, with a tiny baton raised for the first measures of a distant and tinkling music.

"There," the woman said, taking the lamp from Edmund and setting it down carefully on the table. "There. Sit down now. It's more comfortable, isn't it?" She turned her head and smiled at Miss Carolin, a very placid woman with silky black hair, two smooth masses of it, and plump fingers that were touched gently together, tip to tip, on her immaculate starched apron.

"It's—it's very nice," Miss Carolin said. She was smiling also, but rather fixedly. The minuet, she thought; tinkle, tinkle. How ridiculous! "Oh, yes," she added, as if someone had warned her in an urgent whisper to continue this conversation. "It's very . . ."

"Not much style," the woman said, smoothing out a brocaded red cloth under the lamp and gazing around composedly. "But we do what we can, don't we, Edmund?" Her eyes came back to Miss Carolin and she smoothed the cloth absently again. "Is there anything wrong?" she asked suddenly. "Are you worried about anything? Surprised?"

"Oh, no," Miss Carolin said. She wanted to sound absolutely convincing. "No, not at all.

"Aren't you?" the woman said. She seemed pleased. "That's all right, then, I'll get you some tea. You're very quiet, Edmund."

They looked at each other and at Miss Carolin, very quickly, from one to the other of them. "Edmund," the woman had said, giving the name a slight emphasis. "Ed-mund."

He sat down across from Miss Carolin then. It was not warm in the room—cool, rather—but he took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his palms on it and would not look directly at Miss Carolin. He seemed—different somehow; older and more haggard. Oh, dear! Miss Carolin thought. Oh, dear! Why had she come?

She began to feel very strange in this room. She did not like it. She touched a button on her dress, put a finger under it, twisted it anxiously, pulled on it. At the same time she gave Edmund a bright tremulous smile. All he needed,

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perhaps, was some sort of encouragement from her. Wasn't it —wasn't it very quiet here? she asked him. So far off from everyone.

"Far off?" Edmund said. He would not look up at her, simply would not. Then in a surly tone, as if he wanted to quarrel with her, he said that things had been stolen from him at Pinemount House. Little things—a fountain pen, a cheap camera. Miss Carolin shook her head, much shocked. Oh, no, she said. Some mistake, surely. No one at Pinemount . . .

"So you didn't miss anything," Edmund said. "I told you, didn't I?" he added loudly, turning his head in the direction of the kitchen. "I told you she wouldn't."

"Yes," the woman called out, apparently listening to them. "You told me. How's her friend, Edmund? What did her friend think?"

Her friend? Miss Carolin thought. She twisted awkwardly in the chair. Oh! Miss Briggs! But why—

"Nothing," Edmund said. Then he did an incredible thing. He took a small flask out of his pocket, drank from it, put the stopper back, then looked anxiously at the kitchen door—not at Miss Carolin. "He grinned slightly. "I thought you knew," he said. "One of them got a man, Clara."

"Isn't that nice?" The woman said. A dish clattered. "My!"

"So the dear things aren't talking any more." Edmund said. The lamplight threw queer shadows under his eyes. "God!" he said; "but they make you sick, Clara—the whole stupid lot of them."

Miss Carolin had to swallow several times. She was unable to understand any of this. What was wrong? What was the matter with Edmund?

"Miss Briggs?" she said, anxious to pacify him. "Oh, no, Edmund. I didn't tell her a thing about—about us. Not a word."

But Edmund might have been alone in the room. It was now dark outside, Miss Carolin noticed. Not a star out. Not a light anywhere.

"Fat, silly cows," Edmund went on. "Always looking at you, Clara. Touching you. You wouldn't believe—"

"Edmund," the woman said. She came in with a tray. "A salmon salad," she said, apparently to Miss Carolin," and some hot tea. That's nice, isn't it? All right now, Edmund. Company. Do try to behave yourself."

Up there on the mantelshelf the French woman poised daintily, listening, waiting for the eternally delayed tinkle, tinkle. I want to go, Miss Carolin thought; I don't like this; I'll tell them that I— But how dark it would be outside! She began to bite her lips furtively. The woman looked at her. She had the fine creamy com-

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plexion stout women so often have.

"There," she said. "You've frightened her, Edmund. The poor thing!" Her voice had the exaggerated solicitude frequently used to comfort a child. "And now she won't eat, Edmund. She won't even touch her nice salad."

At this point someone tapped Miss Carolin's shoulder. Not Edmund. Not the woman. *I suppose you remember me,* Inspector Benson remarked tartly; *you should, madam, because I told you about these people, didn't I? Oh, yes! Mr. and Mrs. John Thomas Stacey. Clara Stacey. Come now! You remembered Clara, all right—the moment you heard the name in the hall you pictured a stout woman with sleepy black eyes and powerful forearms. Then Edmund raised the lamp. And when you saw her standing there and looking at you . . .*

"Give her some tea," the woman said. "Good and hot, Edmund. You've upset her."

Cream? Miss Carolin thought numbly. Why, yes. Yes, Edmund, please. Then she had the cup in her hand and it shook comically, as if she were making an attempt to beat time with it. For what? For that minuet. Tinkle, tinkle. And the lonely darkness outside . . .

And another thing, Inspector Benson interjected curtly, as if very much disappointed with her. *You know where you are now, don't you? In the soup, Miss Carolin. That's right. In the soup. There was a time when he used to call you his Dear Lady. Not now, though; not here. Why? Well—it's not really necessary. Not any more. He got what he wanted at Pinemount House—a silly woman named Janet Alice Carolin. I warned you, didn't I? But would you listen to me?*

Clara ate in small, greedy forkfuls, watching Miss Carolin. Edmund got up, pushing his chair back angrily.

"You can always eat," Edmund said. "Always stuff yourself, can't you?"

"You mustn't get impudent with me," the fat woman said. She remained very placid. "Not with me, Edmund. You know I've got to keep up my strength. You're not going to be any help at all. Not tonight. You just—take the tea out of her hands, can't you? She's beginning to spill it all over."

Tonight! Inspector Benson picked up the word, lifting a significant finger to Miss Carolin. *You caught that, didn't you? And you remember a trunk, Miss Carolin. Four trunks. One, two, three, four. Now five. I suppose one morning, when you were waiting for him in the summerhouse, he searched your room. For what? For your bankbook, of course. For your thirty-eight hundred dollars. Oh, yes! He kept the bankbook; that's why he said things had been*

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stolen from him at Pinemount; he wanted to find out if you'd missed the bankbook, and perhaps mentioned it to Miss Briggs or anyone. But you're not a very business-like woman, Miss Carolin, and even if you had missed it you would never have suspected Edmund: Never!

Which means that he now has your bankbook. And your signature. That's right—your signature. He got that the other afternoon without even half trying. The book of poems, remember? Dear Elizabeth Barrett Browning! He managed it a little differently this time, had to, but people of his sort never really change the essentials. Over in Pittsfield, I suggest, there's a new account under the name of Janet Alice Carolin—the woman already must have attended to that part. The rest of it is going to go off now like clock-work. Why not? They never had any trouble before, did they? And you yourself? Well—they have you, you know—have you right in the soup; and there is a routine they follow in these cases. They just . . .

The woman appeared suddenly from the kitchen, although Miss Carolin had not noticed her get up and go out a minute ago. She had more salad.

"I do like salmon," she told Edmund conversationally; "and I'm not going to waste any of it. And it's real nice. I put eggs in it and some chopped onion and a dash of vinegar. Has she said anything at all to you?"

Oh, no, Miss Carolin wanted to say. I have not said anything. Why should I? But I'm not well, I'm afraid. Perhaps Edmund would call a taxi for me. Or—

She could hear Inspector Benson cluck sympathetically. *That's not good, Miss Carolin; you're biting your lips, but you're not saying anything. And you must talk to them, you know; you must keep this going. They'll be inclined to wait for an hour or two until you're upstairs and asleep. Why? Less fuss. But if there's a window in your room, and a porch roof, and you're very quiet and careful about what you do . . .*

"Edmund," Miss Carolin whispered. "I'm very tired, Edmund. Do you think I could go upstairs now?"

"Upstairs?" the woman said. She seemed puzzled. "Oh, there's time," she said. "Plenty of time. Isn't there, Edmund?"

"I want a drink," Edmund said, moving suddenly and violently from his window. "Good God, Clara! Look at her! Do you suppose she—"

"Then get a drink," the woman said, a bit nasty. "Go on. I'm used to it. Drink yourself stupid. You're no help to me at times like this. You never were."

"Because I've got a little common humanity in me," Edmund said. He was breathing heavily.

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"So that's it," the woman said. "Common humanity. Then who brought her here? Go on, tell me. Just tell me. But you're not going to get out of it this time. Not this time, Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett. She must weigh a hundred and eighty pounds. You can see that. And how can you expect me—"

Edmund strode to the table and shouted at her; but quite soon all of it became noiseless pantomine to Miss Carolin. It was as if she felt nothing below the eyes; and then even her eyes failed her. The walls of the room, the man, the nasty woman, the china figurines, the long narrow windows—everything wavered and dipped, lengthened fantastically, distorted themselves, as if they had all become soluble in clear liquid.

"She's not right," the woman said, loudly but distantly. "She acts —You did it this time, didn't you? She's not normal. Well, clear the table at least and close that window. It's cold in here, anyway—like ice."

Yes, Miss Carolin thought, like ice; like ice water all around, and no clothes on. That seemed very comical to her. She put her hand over her mouth, but she could not refrain from giggling.

"Well, I tell you she isn't," the woman said, "and I don't like it. And are you sure there won't be any trouble about her bankbook?"

Then Miss Carolin looked up at them, humming to herself and waving her arms in the stately minuet measure. The woman backed off a little. *Good,* Inspector Benson said, approvingly. *You've got them a bit flustered, both of them. Edmund's frightened now—he's almost as frightened as you.*

"Stop that!" Edmund shouted at her, lifting his hand. "Stop it!"

"Don't like it at all," the woman grumbled. She shook her head, pursed her lips, and gazed down at Miss Carolin as if fastidiously revolted. "I think maybe I'd better leave you alone with her. Talk to her, can't you? Quiet her down."

"All right," Edmund said. He was perspiring, his lips trembling. "Here," he said, grabbing Miss Carolin's shoulders almost desperately. "What's the matter with you? What are you acting like this for?"

The woman had gone back to the kitchen. Miss Carolin, watching her, gave a soft cunning tug at Edmund's coat sleeve to bring him closer. She knew what she had to guard against—that woman. Not Edmund. Now that they were alone at last, he would help her.

"The village," she whispered at him. "You've got to take me to the village, Edmund. Now—before she comes back. I don't like her. She's a bad woman, Edmund.

"What?" Edmund said, whispering also, a kind of dismayed shock in his eyes. He jumped back. "What are you talking about? How do you—Clara!"

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The woman returned, her face placid again.

"She wants to go to the village," Edmund said, wetting his lips. "Now. Right away. She says she doesn't like you."

"Doesn't she?" the woman said, primly and slowly, staring at Miss Carolin. "That's too bad. Did she tell you why, Edmund?"

Oh, yes, Miss Carolin whispered frantically; she liked her—she liked her very much. Edmund had lied. Edmund had . . .

"You wouldn't eat anything," the woman said. "Nor look at me—not even once. Why? Are you afraid of me?"

Miss Carolin shook her head craftily. Her fingers plucked at the brocaded red cloth and rolled it up into tight neat folds. No, she said; she was not afraid. It was only that she had to go to the village.

"But you are afraid," the woman persisted. "I know you are. I've felt it—I've felt it all along. And I know why. You must have let something slip, Edmund. What did you tell her? What did she find out about us?"

Miss Carolin shook her head. Tinkle, tinkle. Her fingers kept pushing and twisting themselves, like independent creatures, into the cloth.

"I want an answer," the woman went on stolidly, "and you're going to give me an answer. Do you hear? Why are you afraid of me? What do you think I'm going to do to you?"

Miss Carolin, having moved her glance away slyly, now gagged at a button on Edmund's coat sleeve.

"All right," Edmund said—the woman had nodded to him. "All right, Miss Janet Alice Carolin. You'd better tell us. What's buzzing around in that silly head of yours?"

Miss Carolin began to tremble, dreadfully, silently, without looking at either of them. It was wrong of Edmund to talk to her that way. Very wrong. He must not say such things when . . .

"Wait a minute," the woman said. "What's that?"

Edmund, after hesitating a moment, ran past them to one of the windows.

"It's a car," he said. "And I think—it is! It's turning in here. Clara! She must have told someone!"

"No," the woman said. "No, she didn't. She's not acting now. Don't lose your head, Edmund. Just go out there and get rid of them, whoever they are." She moved around the table toward Miss Carolin. "And don't worry about her," she said. "I'll stay here, Edmund. I'll keep her quiet."

But Miss Carolin got up at once, panting.

"Don't come near me!" she cried out. "Don't touch me. Don't, don't, don't!"

"Keep still!" the woman said.

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But the quickness with which she approached, the intent purpose—her eyes fixed on Miss Carolin and her two hands clawed savagely—were too frightening. Miss Carolin stumbled away from her, pushing her arms out blindly and at the same time drawing her body in like a bow. She fell against the table, the table crashed over, and the lamp went down with it. "Would you now?" the woman said, her eyes venomous. "Ah, no! You're not—"

Miss Carolin flung a chair at her and the thud shook the whole room. Someone gave a harsh, breathless, and anguished sob. It was not Miss Carolin. "Edmund!" the woman screamed. "Edmunnnd!"

Miss Carolin could see the windows now, but very faintly.

"Oh, my God!" the woman said. "Can't he hear me? Edmund! Edmund!"

She seemed to be thrashing around in the blackness.

The door, Inspector Benson said urgently, *the hall door to cut you off. But the other one—the one to the kitchen.*

By that time, however, Miss Carolin was done. She could only stand motionless. Kill me, she thought; I don't care any more. Only—only you must let Edmund do it. You mustn't touch me. Stay where you are and I'll wait for him. I'll . . .

The woman was suddenly at her legs, clawing for her. No! Miss Carolin thought wildly. She kicked down as hard as she could and then somehow she was in the kitchen. She ran through it. There was a door ahead of her—then dimness, rocky earth, a few stars, a path. Headlights shone at the front of the house. Edmund was at the side of a car, laughing loudly, talking to someone. She fell. She crawled forward on gravel, very cunningly. She heard a man's voice saying:

"—saw her get into the car with you. Well, I yelled, of course. 'Hey!' I says. 'Your change, lady. You forgot it.' But you went off too fast. Well, all right, I think, that's Mr. Summers' car, and I'll drop off the change tonight, after I close up. So I did. I wouldn't want her to think that anyone at Potter's was trying to—"

"Of course," Edmund said, and incredibly it was the old Edmund—correct, courteous, agreeable. "I'll see that she gets it. Thank you, Mr. Potter. Thank you very much."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Potter said. "I only—"

Miss Carolin opened the car door on the other side. Edmund, beyond Mr. Potter, jumped back quickly.

"Stop them!" the woman screamed from somewhere on the porch. "Stop them, you fool! I've hurt my leg."

"Eh?" Mr. Potter said. "What? What's all this?"

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Edmund came at him and the druggist shoved Edmund away with reflex action, and then looked around at Miss Carolin. She was on her knees on the car floor, her brown hair ragged, her hands bloody and bruised from the gravel. She was pulling gently at him.

"Oh, lady!" Mr. Potter said.

Then Mr. Potter turned and hit Edmund with a satchel or something. Edmund fell.

"What in the name of heaven have they been doing to you?" Mr. Potter said, very agitated now. "We'd better get out of here and right now—right double damned quick."

Thank you, Miss Carolin wanted to say. "Tinkle, tinkle," was what she actually said. But it was all right now; she just rested her head against the seat and floated away from the car, from Mr. Potter, from everything, into regions of gentle dimness . . .

Miss Briggs, arriving late the next day at a Pittsfield nursing home, took complete and efficient charge of everything—the diet and care, the whispered medical consultations, the bed-side watch. And that watch proved necessary because several times during the night, even though she was under sedation, Miss Carolin sat up, making a peculiar noise in her throat and pushing at invisible things. "Hush," Miss Briggs told her quietly, each time it happened. "Hush. It's all right now—it's all over, Janet."

In a few days she was fine—quite normal again. She could talk sensibly to Miss Briggs and agree that she should have suspected, that very first day when Mr. Edmund DeHaven Hartlett had walked up to her in the summerhouse, the type of man he really was. Yes, Miss Carolin said humbly; yes, of course. But something, she didn't know what, something about it all . . .

"Something?" Miss Briggs said. "Nonsense! Pure nonsense, Janet," and she arranged the covers and tiptoed out of the room so Miss Carolin could enjoy her afternoon nap. It was difficult to sleep, though. Miss Carolin turned her head on the pillow and crumpled up in one palm the newspaper clipping that showed Edmund's picture, and rested her big, flabby forearm over her eyes, and did a very silly and childish thing. No one heard her, not even Miss Briggs. But then that was the way it had always been with Miss Carolin. There was no one who had ever wanted to hear her, especially when she was weeping, Dear Lady.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***Each Drop Guaranteed***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Maury

LOCALE: Halcyon, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The early moments in a poison investigation are the most valuable. So Dr. Maury knew that he had to work fast . . .*

ABSURDLY, DR. MAURY DECIDED, IT was a cast of characters directly out of a novel by Charlotte Brontë—in the sense that there was no mistaking the type of role into which each of the Carleton household fell. As he drove precariously through the Florida night and torrential downpour, risking his own neck to reach the estate before death should beat him to the wire, the doctor mentally tagged each member with a proper label.

Unmistakably, Jepson Carleton (turpentine, citrus, and utilities tycoon) was the tyrannical family head, the absolute master of his wife, his spinster sister, and the niece who was his ward.

Emma Carleton, a synthetically handsome woman in a rather pitiful decalcomania fashion, played the acquiescent wife whose sole release from mental and emotional abjection lay, fantastically, in entering prize contests—those in the nature of fill-in-the-last-line-of-this-jingle-and-win-$25,000 sort.

Malvina Carleton was the spinster-sister type to the hilt, being a dessicated, waspish woman, swathed in a lifetime of dotted foulards, and about as agreeable to live with under the same roof as a civilized cobra.

Lastly there was Binny, the perfect archetype of the orphaned niece in smoldering rebellion. Dr. Maury often thought of her as a

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latent flame—the way young love is a flame, with every urge of her burgeoning youth poured into a thwarted longing for a certain Frank Nevin, a registered pharmacist with all the prospects for success (in Jepson Carleton's acrid opinion) of a meaty young bull in a shopful of delicate drugs.

"An inconsequential pipsqueak," Carleton had said during one of Dr. Maury's professional calls, and dipping as ever into his inexhaustible collection of clichés. "A typical fortune hunter. I set the young whelp right on that score, Maury."

"He discussed it with you?"

"He did. He came to tell me he was marrying Binny. I told him to go right ahead."

Carleton's face had looked, Dr. Maury thought, much as Nero's must have, or Caligula's when settling the fate of a once-favorite slave.

"Wasn't that a contradiction?" the doctor asked.

"No, I meant it. Told him she was perfectly free to make her own bed and lie in it. But I also told him that if he married Binny I would cut her out of my will and throw her out of the house. She's down for two millions."

"Does she know all this?"

"Not unless Nevin told her. Psychologically quite perfect, Doctor."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Breeding. Nevin's stock may be penniless, but basically it's sound. The Georgia Nevins. Gone to seed but enough gentility left in the boy to make him bow out."

"I still don't understand. I know Frank Nevin—casually I admit, his shop handles my prescriptions—but I wouldn't call him a fortune hunter."

"A convenient phrase, Doctor. Possibly he isn't, but he did see the light. I painted the sort of colorless existence he had to offer Binny—a one-bedroom house on the outskirts of Halcyon, the penny-pinching struggle of a young couple in the lower middle-income bracket, always on the fringe of living, never in it—all that attrition in exchange for this."

The "this" had been accompanied by an inclusive gesture embracing his wealth, the estate, the chateau in St. Tropez, the chalet at Banff—an all-over life of satin ease. What it failed to embrace was the more deadly attrition of bondage to Carleton's smallest whim.

"How is Binny taking it? Nevin's bowing out, I mean."

"She hates him, naturally."

"For having thrown her over?"

"What else?"

"But perhaps he did speak? Explain to her?"

"I doubt it; but if he has, then the hatred would be for me. But whoever it's for it's strong—killing strong."

Was there any connection, Dr. Maury wondered, between that scene and now? Was Carleton's overdose of the opiate accidental

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or deliberate? As the car crept cautiously under flaring heavens through the hub-high water hollows of the flooded road, the physician tried to recall in detail Mrs. Carleton's wording when she had telephoned him twenty minutes ago.

"Doctor Maury?"

"Yes?"

"Emma Carleton, Doctor."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Carleton."

"Jepson apparently has taken an overdose of the medicine you prescribed last week."

Dr. Maury had suppressed a shocked curse. The medical preparation was Pantopon, a purified mixture of opium alkaloids, containing 50 per cent of morphine. Its use was for the checking of intestinal peristalsis.

"How much?"

"The bottle is empty. It's hard to arouse him—there are moments of confused consciousness but then he passes out again. Will you come at once?"

Thunder had detonated with an ear-splitting crash.

"How are the roads out there?"

"They're pretty well under, I'm afraid. Is Jepson's condition dangerous?"

"Extremely so. Listen carefully, please. Give him black coffee. Give him all the black coffee you can force him to drink."

"I suppose the caffein—?"

"Exactly—against cardiac collapse. I'd suggest washing out his stomach, slapping his face with wet towels, forcing him to walk, but he's bedridden, too weak, and it might do more harm than good. Caffein, Mrs. Carleton, is the one thing you have in the house that may keep him alive until I get there. Force every drop of black coffee into him that you can."

"Silly—" Emma Carleton's voice had suddenly faltered. "The shock—my head is swimming—I'll tell Binny about the coffee and—"

Thunder crashed again. The line had gone dead, the lights flickered out. Dr. Maury had lighted a kerosene lamp, kept on hand for such power failures during this month of big winds. He had taken off his shoes and socks, and rolled the pants legs up over his calves. To the regular contents of his medical bag he had added a stomach tube, potassium permanganate, and Atropine.

The Carleton estate lay four miles inland from Halcyon—a coastal town some miles north of Miami—and under normal road conditions the drive took only fifteen minutes. Tonight it took Dr. Maury over an hour, creeping through a thunderous deluge, and when he got there Carleton was dead.

Simpson, the Haitian butler, closed the heavy front door, slicing off the turbulent night from the hush of the great hall, obscure now in a wavering glow of candlelight. He took Dr. Maury's bag and rain-

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coat, and provided towels to dry his feet before getting into socks and shoes.

"There is no hurry, Doctor Maury, sir. Mister Jepson, he is passed. Fifteen minutes, now, ago."

"Is Mrs. Carleton all right?"

"Is shockingly collapsed, sir, from sadness. In her living room."

"Miss Binny?"

"Miss Binny and Miss Malvina they are respectful at Mister Jepson's bedside."

Maury moved through shadowy spaces to the floor above. There was a feudal flavor to Carleton's bedroom, as there had been to the man himself. A somber mélange of expensive woods, tapestries, and paintings of the brown-fiddle school—indeed, nothing seemed missing except crossed halberds and a mounted suit of armor.

A great double bed was in keeping, its posts and headboard all but baronial. A bedside table held a copper kettle of water, kept simmering over a spirit lamp, a half empty jar labeled with the name of a well-known brand of instant coffee—the same, Dr. Maury noticed, as he used himself—and a cup and saucer, the cup still a third full of black coffee.

In addition there were a thermos carafe and a glass with some colorless liquid in its base, and finally a small bottle that had contained the Pantopon pills (one-third of a grain each) with its label of the Halcyon drug store where young Frank Nevin was the pharmacist. The bottle was empty.

Brown driblets of coffee had run from Carleton's lower lip down across the chin, leaving dark stains on the white pajama top. With a stethoscope Dr. Maury listened carefully over the body's precordial area where the heart beat can be readily recognized, then over the larynx where the least trace of breath can be heard. He took his time, knowing that in some cases of profound coma from morphine the vital centers may be so depressed that the cardiac and respiratory movements may be overlooked in a casual examination.

Finally he said to Binny and Malvina, "Mr. Carleton is dead."

They were seated, the two women, the dessicated old one and the flambant young, at opposite ends of a Knole sofa, their two pale dissimilar faces like antipodal moons in the diffused lamplight.

"We know." Malvina then added with a delicately bitter wit, "Need I say prematurely so?"

Well, Dr. Maury thought, there was the issue, plainly etched by Malvina Carleton's acidulous tongue. In Malvina's thoughts—and in his own—accidental poisoning was ruled out. Accidental carelessness in any matter, and especially concerning an overdosage of a powerful drug, would have been unthinkably foreign to Carleton's nature. Suicide? Never. Not Carleton. Yes, there was bound to be

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trouble and in all honesty Dr. Maury admitted to himself that there should be.

It was murder—and the most difficult type of murder to prove. Unless the murderer could be shocked or trapped into making a witnessed confession . . .

So many poisoners went scot-free even when suspected and brought to trial, no matter how obviously strong the motive. And motives were strong enough in this instance, heaven knew. Take Emma Carleton. Ten years of married subjugation, not in reality being a wife, but rather a bought-and-paid-for figurehead, chatelaine to a tyrannical crank. Whatever love or affection or desire there might have been in the beginning was now long dead.

Then Binny. How clear that motive was and how eagerly (and with what justice, too, Dr. Maury admitted) the sheriff and county prosecutor would seize upon it. The erasure of love through Carleton's cruel whim and the withdrawal of a fortune, resulting in the powerful, blinded hatred of the young . . .

Malvina? How would her candidacy as a suspect fit? Dependency? She had no money of her own, the Carleton wealth having been entirely in her brother's hands. Had the galling, ever ignominious necessity of asking him for pin money caused her to administer the Pantopon, those pellets of Lethe, that river of Hades whose waters caused forgetfulness of the past and, when drunk too deeply, death?

Yes, it would be one of those three. But which? And where was the proof—that ephemeral nightmare of all such poison-case prosecutions?

Or where, Dr. Maury wondered, lay the leverage that would cause the murderer to break?

Any immediate normal procedure was at a standstill. The telephone lines were dead. A messenger would have to be despatched to the sheriff's office and eventually would get through the violent night, but that would take hours. So these early, valuable moments in a poison investigation were solely up to him.

He ignored any direct reaction to Malvina's remark and asked instead, "Did you give him the coffee, Binny?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"How many cups?"

"Six—seven and very strong. Two teaspoons of the instant to each cup."

"He was able to keep it down?"

"Yes."

Something odd there, something damnably queer. He knew the number of pills originally in the bottle. Four had been taken during the week by Carleton. The rest evidently had been swallowed tonight—with a total morphine content of four grains. Fatally toxic,

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of course, without immediate treatment to counteract the drug.

But that was it.

The treatment *had* been reasonably prompt, since Emma Carleton had said over the telephone that her husband was having "moments of confused consciousness." There was every reason, every hope in the world, that six or seven cups of very strong black coffee would have kept Carleton alive until now, and amenable to proper restorative measures.

He drew the counterpane up over Carleton's face as he said to Malvina, "Would you mind sending one of the men for the sheriff?"

"The proper gesture, Doctor?"

"You might call it that. I know it will be a matter of hours, and perhaps dangerous for the messenger, but it must be done."

Malvina gathered her aura of suspicion and vindictiveness about her and carried it out of the room.

Then Dr. Maury said to Binny, "I suppose one of the maids is with Mrs. Carleton?"

"Yes."

"I'll look in on her presently. Just now I'd like to know things. How did this all happen, Binny?"

"From when?"

Dr. Maury looked at his watch. Ten after midnight. The latitude of the clinical course for morphine poisoning was elastically wide, but it could in general be taken for granted that the symptoms would set in in around 20 minutes if the drug were ingested. The course to death could then vary as greatly as 45 minutes to four days.

Oddly, the "when" or "how" of having taken the Pantopon did not seem as important to Dr. Maury as did the baffling riddle of why Carleton had failed to stay alive. The abominable but possible thought occurred: had Binny lied? Had she withheld the black coffee rather than having forced her uncle to drink it? Like that play the doctor remembered where a heart patient had died during an attack because the medicine was purposely held out of reach?

"From when?" he repeated. "Say from an hour before Mrs. Carleton telephoned me, Binny. Start around ten o'clock."

He went to a mahogany desk, elaborately inlaid with floral designs in colored woods, and sat down. The top sheet of a scratch pad was scribbled over with jottings which brought a faint smile to the physician's lips.

With flavor as fine as can be—
as true as can be—
Each drop guaranteed—ta da da —???

"One of Mrs. Carleton's jingle contests?" he asked, tearing off the sheet and setting it aside.

"Probably, Doctor. Aunt Emma is always working on them, the way some women do knitting. Probably while sitting here with Uncle Jepson."

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"When?"

For a moment Binny was lost in thought.

"You said from ten o'clock on. As I remember, I'd come upstairs to go to bed, and Aunt Emma came out of here as I passed and said that Uncle Jepson wanted some limeade. I went back down and got that thermosful. Then I ran into Aunt Malvina in the hallway when I came back up. She said she was taking Aunt Emma's place in here for a while, and took the thermos from me."

"Was Mrs. Carleton in here then?"

"Yes, I saw her when Aunt Malvina opened the door."

Dr. Maury made jottings on the pad.

"You then went to bed, Binny?"

"No, I stood at a window watching the storm and during one of the lightning flares I saw—"

Color suffused Binny's cheeks, as swiftly ebbed, and Dr. Maury felt an immense sympathy for her—for all the torturing problems of the young in love. He wanted to help and to shield her, lead her at least to safety through the evil swamp now tenanting her home.

"Frank Nevin, Binny?"

She shrugged with the dramatic fatality of nineteen.

"There's no sense in concealing it. Frank is bound to admit it when he hears about this. I let him in and we talked in the library. He said he couldn't stand it any longer —my thinking he had thrown me over so callously, so senselessly. Doctor, all Frank wanted to do was to explain, to tell me why. Then he was going away. Leaving Halcyon. Leaving me."

"He told you of his talk with your uncle?"

"Fully. I tried to convince him that it didn't matter—that nothing mattered so long as we had each other. But he simply wouldn't listen. He's so—he's so damn *noble!*"

Here we go again, the doctor thought. Not only was the cast out of Brontë, but the Victorian situation as well. Thwarted love—changed will—noble lover—

"How long did Frank stay here, Binny?"

"Almost an hour, Doctor, because when I came back up, the door of Aunt Emma's living room was open and I could see her telephoning. Then just about the time I reached my room the storm knocked out the power lines. There was a lot of confusion while the servants were getting lamps and things, and about ten or fifteen minutes later Aunt Malvina told me Uncle Jepson was poisoned and that I would have to give him black coffee while she took care of Aunt Emma who had collapsed with hysterics."

"Did you yourself get the coffee? The kettle and the spirit lamp?"

"No, they were already here. Aunt Emma had got them before she collapsed."

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"Binny, you made no mistake about the number of cups your uncle drank?"

"No, Doctor. It was surely six or seven."

"Were you alone with him during the time?"

"Well, no—Aunt Malvina sort of shuttled between Aunt Emma's room and here. She helped me."

Dr. Maury tore off his notes and placed them beside the sheet on which Emma Carleton had scribbled her jingle last-lines. Absently, he wondered how the *ta-da-da* in the line reading *Each drop guaranteed—ta da da—???* would be filled in. His glance rested on a round paper seal containing the contest coffee brand's trade name. Evidently it had been lifted from the jar top and would, he believed, have to be enclosed with the contestant's completed jingle.

He stood up and moved over to the bed table. With the tip of his tongue he tested the liquids left in the coffee cup, the limeade glass, the thermos bottle. He returned to the desk, jotted an additional note, then shoved the notes into his pocket—just as realization crashed in his brain. He was sick with anger, but he knew the course he must now follow.

"Will you stay here, Binny? Do you mind?"

"No."

"If anyone comes in don't let a thing here be touched. And I mean *anybody*—including your aunts. Call me if there should be any argument. I'll be with Mrs. Carleton."

A bathroom, Dr. Maury knew, connected this bedroom with Emma Carleton's suite and he went that way rather than out through the hall. He paused to wash his hands and observed, in the pale light of a candle standing on a shelf, several small, caked dark stains on the basin's rim. Yes, the pieces were beginning to fit. Where, he wondered, would he have temporarily hidden it under the compulsion of doing it so swiftly A thoughtful study of the tiled room, then his hand groped gently down among soiled toweling in a wicker hamper . . . and touched glass. Clever. Very clever. Even the Borgias couldn't have pulled a better job.

Emma Carleton lay on a chaise-longue and Dr. Maury, as always, was struck by the decal quality of her looks—their static handsomeness rather than any true beauty, such as graced Binny. Malvina was sitting in shriveling acidity beside her.

"The sheriff has been sent for, Doctor," Malvina said. "Although if Joey gets there it will be a miracle. He took the service wagon—higher road clearance."

"Good." Then Dr. Maury added with a slight emphasis, as if he were deliberately freighting the request with an odd significance, would you be kind enough to leave me alone with Mrs. Carleton?"

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Malvina looked at him suspiciously; her button eyes were black lively spots in wrinkled parchment.

"A private, shall we say, examination?"

Dr. Maury simply smiled, and Malvina's answering smile was equally enigmatic. She left by the bathroom door, and he noticed that she did not close it completely. A crack remained.

Perfunctorily, Dr. Maury felt Emma Carleton's pulse, touched a hand to her forehead, considered her breathing. "Will you open your eyes, please?" he said.

Involuntarily she did so. With a glacé calmness she batteried their china-blue prettiness up at the physician and said wth complete composure, "Since telephoning you I have decided that it was murder."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Carleton."

"A wretched act of impulse."

"I prefer to think of it as the work of a clever opportunist."

"Does the terminology matter? The hot-headed rage of youth—hatred—I shall naturally outline Binny's motivation to the sheriff. What other course is open?"

"My own conclusions exactly."

"But what other course is there?"

Dr. Maury noted an all but imperceptible widening of the bathroom doorway's crack, and mentally pictured behind it the paperish small saucers of Malvina Carleton's ears. He considered Emma Carleton's nerve makeup as he felt that he understood it, and decided that shock tactics would be best.

"Admittedly," he said, "Mr. Carleton's death offered both relief and release. But not to Binny alone."

"Aren't we—straying?"

"I think not." He was going out on a limb. Badly so, in a quixotic tilt against the power of the Carleton money and influence, now personified in the victim's widow. For the future happiness, for the very life of Binny. . . . "Who first became alarmed over your husband's condition?"

"Malvina. She had relieved me to sit with him until he slept—the standardized procedure of every night, every night after night, Doctor. She thought he had dropped off, then felt his breathing to be unnatural and almost at once noticed that the medicine bottle was empty."

"So it was Malvina who made it necessary for you to call me up."

"Well, yes, only that seems an odd way of putting it?"

"Would you have phoned me otherwise, Mrs. Carleton?"

"Phoned you?" Her glacé eyes were sparked with brief pinpoints of sudden fear. "Surely you're not just being deliberately rude?"

"No, just leading to my conclusions."

"Then reach them, please."

"If the call to me had not been

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compulsory, the poison would have taken full effect and in the morning Mr. Carleton would be discovered dead. The point is that time—the hours of the night—would have afforded opportunity for getting rid of all the evidential proof." Then Dr. Maury added abruptly, "I believe that during your bedside watch you had been sitting at your husband's desk working out the last line of a jingle contest?"

"Well? Stick to the subject, Doctor."

"I am. Very much so. At ten o'clock Mr. Carleton asked for limeade. You found Binny out in the hall on the way to her room and sent her back down for some."

"Yes?"

"Your sister-in-law brought it in to you and prepared to take your place until her brother fell asleep. You poured him a glass of limeade before leaving—perhaps while Miss Carleton was getting settled?"

"I believe I did, and I suppose this leads up to the point that the poison was in the limeade? Prepared and fetched by Binny?"

"No, not in the thermos which Binny brought. In the glassful that was poured. Morphine is quite soluble in water."

Her smile was inscrutable.

"Myself, then? Or Malvina?"

Dr. Maury noticed the jerk of the bathroom door as it opened a bit wider.

"Mrs. Carleton, the method and fact of having given Mr. Carleton poison are important, yes, and provide a basis for a murder indictment. But there is another basis that will serve equally well."

"Must we continue with these everlasting riddles?

"This second basis for a murder indictment is the more valuable in that it offers conclusive proof as to who committed the crime. I refer to the deliberate withholding of medication, ordered by a physician, that would have saved your husband from death."

Her air of reasonable bewilderment was perfect.

"Wouldn't that indicate collusion? Binny and Malvina? They gave Jepson the coffee. Or did they? I did exactly as you ordered, Doctor. Even with all the confusion caused by the power failure, and the shock I had sustained, it was I who got the jar of instant coffee from the kitchen, found the spirit lamp kettle, and arranged them on the bed table before collapsing entirely. Even at the end of my strength I did everything possible to save him."

"I shall tell you what you did in addition to the moves you have described."

"In addition? Dear man, I simply collapsed."

"When I gave you my instructions over the telephone you realized that your husband would be kept alive until I got here. You also realized that an infernal op-

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portunity to circumvent this was at hand."

"But I've just told you—"

"Yes, you did get the jar of instant coffee, the jar now on the bedside table, but the coffee in it is not the brand that was packaged originally. During the confusion of the power failure you emptied the original contents down the bathroom basin. You substituted coffee of another brand, a jar of which you had bought in order to use its paper seal for the prize jingle contest. You concealed the empty contest jar in the bathroom soiled-linen hamper, and later you would have disposed of it. That jar has your fingerprints on it. Yours alone."

Emma Carleton's voice was a tight-drawn string.

"But I did see that he got coffee!"

"The caffein in the coffee was the important thing, Mrs. Carleton, and you murdered your husband by withholding it. That coffee which you substituted from the contest-brand jar is labeled and sold on the basis of its being 97 per cent *caffein free*."

He caught her arms as she loosed a shriek and leaped up to attack him. Malvina helped him hold her while the bitter gall of confession dribbled from her lips.

a tip for travelers . . .

Traveling abroad is an exhilarating experience which rarely leaves time for boredom or empty hours. However, for those occasional moments when you think nostalgically of home, look around on the nearest newsstand . . . and you will probably see one of the following editions of *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE:*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: AGATHA CHRISTIE

TITLE: *Some Day They Will Get Me*

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Miss Marple

LOCALE: Somerset, England

TIME: Between World Wars

COMMENTS: *In which that charming old maiden lady, with her old-world unruffled air and her provincial point of view, looks into the matter of a Secret Society—and vengeance.*

THE CONVERSATION HOVERED round undiscovered and unpunished crimes. Everyone in turn vouchsafed their opinion: Colonel Bantry; his plump amiable wife; Jane Helier; Dr. Lloyd; and even old Miss Marple. The one person who did not speak was the one best fitted in most people's opinion to do so. Sir Henry Clithering, ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, sat silent, twisting his mustache—or rather stroking it—and half smiling, as if some inward thought amused him.

"Sir Henry," said Mrs. Bantry at last. "If you don't say something I shall scream. Are there a lot of crimes that go unpunished or are there not?"

"You're thinking of newspaper headlines, Mrs. Bantry. *SCOTLAND YARD AT FAULT AGAIN*. And a list of unsolved mysteries to follow."

"Which really, I suppose, form a very small percentage of the whole?" said Dr. Lloyd.

"Yes, that is so. The hundreds of crimes that are solved and the perpetrators who are punished are seldom heralded and sung. But that isn't quite the point at issue, is it? When you talk of *undiscovered* crimes and *unsolved* crimes, you are talking of two different things.

© 1929 by Agatha Christie; renewed; originally titled "The Four Suspects"

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In the first category come all the crimes that Scotland Yard never hears about, the crimes that no one even knows have been committed."

"But I suppose there aren't very many of those?" said Mrs. Bantry.

"Aren't there?"

"Sir Henry! You don't mean there *are?*"

"I should think," said Miss Marple thoughtfully, "that there must be quite a very large number."

The charming old lady, with her old-world unruffled air, made her statement in a tone of the utmost placidity.

"My dear Miss Marple," said Colonel Bantry.

"Of course," said Miss Marple, "a lot of people are stupid. And stupid people get found out, whatever they do. But there are quite a number of people who aren't stupid, and one shudders to think of what they might accomplish unless they had very strongly rooted principles."

"Yes," said Sir Henry, "there are a lot of people who aren't stupid. How often does some crime come to light simply by reason of a bit of unmitigated bungling, and each time one asks oneself the question: If this hadn't been bungled, would anyone ever have known?"

"But that's very serious, Clithering," said Colonel Bantry. "Very serious, indeed."

"Is it?"

"What do you mean? Of course it's serious!"

"You say crime goes unpunished. But does it? Unpunished by the law perhaps; but cause and effect works outside the law. To say that every crime brings its own punishment is by way of being a platitude, and yet in my opinion nothing can be truer."

"Perhaps, perhaps," said Colonel Bantry. "But that doesn't alter the seriousness—the—er—seriousness—"

He paused, rather at a loss.

Sir Henry Clithering smiled.

"Ninety-nine people out of a hundred are doubtless of your way of thinking," he said. "But you know, it isn't really guilt that is important—it's innocence. That's the thing that nobody will realize."

"I don't understand," said Jane Helier.

"I do," said Miss Marple. "When Mrs. Trent found half a crown missing from her bag, the person it affected most was the daily woman, Mrs. Arthur. Of course the Trents thought it was her, but being kindly people and knowing she had a large family and a husband who drinks, well—they naturally didn't want to go to extremes. But they felt differently towards her, and they didn't leave her in charge of the house when they went away, which made a great difference to her; and other people began to get a feeling about her too. And then it sud-

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denly came out that it was the governess. Mrs. Trent saw her through a door reflected in a mirror. The purest chance—though I prefer to call it Providence. And that, I think, is what Sir Henry means. Most people would be only interested in who took the money, and it turned out to be the most unlikely person—just like in detective stories! But the real person it was life and death to was poor Mrs. Arthur, who had done nothing. That's what you mean, isn't it, Sir Henry?"

"Yes, Miss Marple, you've hit on my meaning exactly. Your charwoman person was lucky in the instance you relate. Her innocence was finally proved. But some people may go through a lifetime crushed by the weight of a suspicion that is really unjustified."

"Are you thinking of some particular instance, Sir Henry?" asked Mrs. Bantry shrewdly.

"As a matter of fact, Mrs. Bantry, I am. A very curious case. A case where we believe murder to have been committed, but with no possible chance of ever proving it."

"Poison, I suppose," breathed Jane. "Something untraceable."

Dr. Lloyd moved restlessly and Sir Henry shook his head.

"No, dear lady. *Not* the secret arrow poison of the South American Indians! I wish it *were* something of that kind. We have to deal with something much more prosaic—so prosaic, in fact, that there is no hope of bringing the deed home to its perpetrator. An old gentleman who fell downstairs and broke his neck—one of those regrettable accidents which happen every day."

"But what happened really?"

"Who can say?" Sir Henry shrugged his shoulders. "A push from behind? A piece of string tied across the top of the stairs and carefully removed afterwards? That we shall never know."

"But you do think that it—well, that it wasn't an accident? Why?" asked the doctor.

"That's rather a long story, but —well, yes, we're pretty sure. As I said there's no chance of being able to bring the deed home to anyone—the evidence would be too flimsy. But there's the other aspect of the case—the one I was speaking about. You see, there were four people who might have done the trick. One's guilty—*but the other three are innocent.* And unless the truth is found out, those three are going to remain under the terrible shadow of doubt."

"I think," said Mrs. Bantry, "that you'd better tell us your long story."

"I needn't make it so very long after all," said Sir Henry. "I can at any rate condense the beginning. That deals with a German secret society—the *Schwartze Hand* —something after the lines of the Camorra or what is most people's

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idea of the Camorra. A scheme of blackmail and terrorization. The thing started quite suddenly after the War and spread to an amazing extent. Numberless people were victimized by it. The authorities were not successful in coping with it, for its secrets were jealously guarded, and it was almost impossible to find anyone who could be induced to betray them.

"Nothing much was ever known about it in England, but in Germany it was having a most paralyzing effect. It was finally broken up and dispersed through the efforts of one man, a Dr. Rosen, who had at one time been very prominent in Secret Service work. He became a member, penetrated its inmost circle, and was, as I say, instrumental in bringing about its downfall.

"But he was, in consequence, a marked man, and it was deemed wise that he should leave Germany —at any rate for a time. He came to England, and we had letters about him from the police in Berlin. He came and had a personal interview with me. His point of view was both dispassionate and resigned. He had no doubts of what the future held for him.

" 'They will get me, Sir Henry,' he said. 'Not a doubt of it.' He was a big man with a fine head and a very deep voice, with only a slight guttural intonation to tell of his nationality. 'That is a foregone conclusion. It does not matter, I am prepared. I faced the risk when I undertook this business. I have done what I set out to do. The organization can never be put together again. But there are many members of it at liberty and they will take the only revenge they can—my life. It is simply a question of time; but I am anxious that that time should be as long as possible. You see, I am collecting and editing some very interesting material—the result of my life's work. I should like, if possible, to be able to complete my task.'

"He spoke very simply, with a certain grandeur which I could not but admire. I told him we would take all precautions, but he waved my words aside.

" 'Some day, sooner or later, they will get me,' he repeated. 'When that day comes, do not distress yourself. You will, I have no doubt, have done all that is possible.'

"He then proceeded to outline his plans which were simple enough. He proposed to take a small cottage in the country where he could live quietly and go on with his work. In the end he selected a village in Somerset—King's Gnaton, which was seven miles from a railway station, and singularly untouched by civilization. He bought a charming cottage, had various improvements and alterations made, and settled down most contentedly. His household consisted of his niece, Greta,

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a secretary, and Gertrude, an old German servant who had served him faithfully for nearly forty years, and a handyman and gardener who was a native of King's Gnaton."

"The four suspects," said Dr. Lloyd softly.

"Exactly. The four suspects. There is not much more to tell. Life went on peacefully at King's Gnaton for five months and then the blow fell. Dr. Rosen fell down the stairs one morning and was found dead about half an hour later. At the time the accident must have taken place, Gertrude was in her kitchen with the door closed and heard nothing—so *she* says. Fraülein Greta was in the garden planting bulbs—so *she* says. The gardener, Dobbs, was in the small potting shed having his elevenses—so *he* says; and the secretary was out for a walk, and once more there is only his own word for it. No one had an alibi, no one can corroborate anyone else's story. But one thing *is* certain. No one from outside could have done it, for a stranger in the little village of King's Gnaton would be noticed without fail. Both the back and the front doors were locked, all the members of the household having their own keys. So you see it narrows down to those four. And yet each one seems to be above suspicion. Greta, his own brother's child. Gertrude, with forty years of faithful service. Dobbs, who has never been out of King's Gnaton. And Charles Templeton, the secretary—"

"Yes," said Colonel Bantry, "what about him? He seems the suspicious person to my mind. What do you know about him?"

"It is what I knew about him that put him completely out of court—at any rate at the time," said Sir Henry gravely. "You see, Charles Templeton was one of my own men."

"Oh!" said Colonel Bantry, considerably taken aback.

"Yes. I wanted to have someone on the spot, and at the same time I didn't want to cause talk in the village. Rosen really needed a secretary. I put Templeton on the job. He's a gentleman, he speaks German fluently, and he's altogether a very able fellow."

"But, then, which do you suspect?" asked Mrs. Bantry in a bewildered tone. "They all seem so —well, impossible."

"Yes, so it appears. But you can look at the thing from another angle. Fraülein Greta was his niece and a very lovely girl, but the War has shown us time and again that brother can turn against sister, or father against son and so on, and the loveliest and gentlest of young girls did some of the most amazing things. The same thing applies to Gertrude, and who knows what other forces might be at work in her case. A quarrel, perhaps, with her master, a grow-

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ing resentment all the more lasting because of the long faithful years behind her. Elderly women of that class can be amazingly bitter sometimes. And Dobbs? Was he above suspicion merely because he had no connection with the family? Money will do much. In some way Dobbs might have been approached and bought.

"For one thing seems certain: some message or some order must have come from outside. Otherwise why five months' immunity? No, the agents of the society must have been at work. Not yet sure of Rosen's perfidy, they delayed till the betrayal had been traced to him beyond any possible doubt. And then, all doubts set aside, they must have sent their message to the spy within the gates—the message that said, *Kill*."

"How nasty!" said Jane Helier.

"But how did the message come? That was the point I tried to elucidate—the one hope of solving my problem. One of those four people must have been communicated with in some way. There would be no delay—I knew that—as soon as the command came it would be carried out. That was a characteristic of the *Schwartze Hand*.

"I went into the question, went into it in a way that will probably strike you as being ridiculously meticulous. Who had come to the cottage that morning? I eliminated nobody. Here is the list."

He took an envelope from his pocket and selected a paper from its contents.

"*The butcher,* bringing some neck of mutton. Investigated and found correct.

"*The grocer's assistant,* bringing a packet of corn flour, two pounds of sugar, a pound of butter, and a pound of coffee. Also investigated and found correct.

"*The postman,* bringing two circulars for Fraülein Rosen, a local letter for Gertrude, three letters for Dr. Rosen, one with a foreign stamp, and two letters for Mr. Templeton, one also with a foreign stamp."

Sir Henry paused and then took a sheaf of documents from the envelope.

"It may interest you to see these for yourself. They were handed to me by the various people concerned, or collected from the waste-paper basket. I need hardly say they've been tested by experts for invisible ink, and so forth."

Everyone crowded round to look. The circulars were respectively from a nurseryman and from a prominent London fur establishment. The two bills addressed to Dr. Rosen were a local one for seeds for the garden and one from a London stationery firm. The letter addressed to him ran as follows:

"My Dear Rosen—Just back from Dr. Helmuth Spath's. I saw Edgar Jackson the other day. He

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and Amos Perry have just come back from Tsingtau. In all Honesty I can't say I envy them the trip. Let me have news of you soon. As I said before: Beware of a certain person. You know who I mean, though you don't agree.—Yours, Georgina."

"Mr. Templeton's mail consisted of this bill, which as you see, is an account rendered from his tailor, and a letter from a friend in Germany," went on Sir Henry. "The latter, unfortunately, he tore up while out on his walk. Finally we have the letter received by Gertrude."

"Dear Mrs. Swartz,—We're hoping as how you be able to come the social on friday evening. the vicar says has he hopes you will—one and all being welcome. The resipy for the ham was very good, and I thanks you for it. Hoping as this finds you well and that we shall see you friday i remain—Yours faithfully, Emma Greene."

Dr. Lloyd smiled a little over this and so did Mrs. Bantry.

"I think the last letter can be put out of court," said Dr. Lloyd.

"I thought the same," said Sir Henry, "but I took the precaution of verifying that there was a Mrs. Greene and a Church Social. One can't be too careful, you know."

"That's what our friend Miss Marple always says," reminded Dr. Lloyd, smiling. "You're lost in a day-dream, Miss Marple. What are you thinking about?"

Miss Marple gave a start.

"So stupid of me," she said. "I was just wondering why the word Honesty in Dr. Rosen's letter was spelled with a capital H."

Mrs. Bantry picked it up.

"So it is," she said. *"Oh!"*

"Yes, dear," said Miss Marple. "I thought you'd notice!"

"There's a definite warning in that letter," said Colonel Bantry. "That's the first thing caught my attention. I notice more than you'd think. Yes, a definite warning—against whom?"

"There's rather a curious point about that letter," said Sir Henry. "According to Templeton, Dr. Rosen opened the letter at breakfast and tossed it across to him saying he didn't know who the fellow was from Adam."

"But it wasn't a fellow," said Jane Helier. "It was signed 'Georgina.'"

"It's difficult to say which it is," said Dr. Lloyd. "It might be Georgey; but it certainly looks more like Georgina. Only it strikes me that the writing is a man's."

"You know, that's interesting," said Colonel Bantry. "His tossing it across the table like that and pretending he knew nothing about it. Wanted to watch somebody's face? Whose face? The girl's or the man's?"

"Or even the cook's?" suggested Mrs. Bantry. "She might have been in the room bringing in the breakfast. But what I don't see is . . ."

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She frowned over the letter. Miss Marple drew closer to her. Miss Marple's finger went out and touched the sheet of paper. They murmured together.

"But why did the secretary tear up the other letter?" asked Jane Helier suddenly. "It seems—oh! I don't know—it seems queer. Why should he have letters from Germany? Although, of course, if he's above suspicion, as you say—"

"But Sir Henry didn't say that," interrupted Miss Marple looking up quickly from her murmured conference with Mrs. Bantry. "He said *four* suspects. So that shows he includes Mr. Templeton. I'm right, am I not, Sir Henry?"

"Yes, Miss Marple. I have learned one thing through bitter experience. Never say to yourself that *anyone* is above suspicion. I gave you reasons just now why three of these people might be guilty, unlikely as it seemed. I did not at that time apply the same process to Charles Templeton. But I came to it by pursuing the rule I have just mentioned. And I was forced to recognize this: that every army and every navy and every police force has a certain number of traitors within its ranks, much as we hate to admit the idea. And I examined dispassionately the case against Charles Templeton.

"I asked myself very much the same questions Miss Helier has just asked. Why should he, alone of all the house, not be able to produce the letter he had received—a letter, moreover, with a German stamp on it. Why should he have letters from Germany?

"The last question was an innocent one, and I actually put it to him. His reply was simple enough. His mother's sister was married to a German. The letter had been from a German girl cousin. So I learned something I did not know before—that Charles Templeton had relations with people in Germany. And that put him definitely on the list of suspects. He is my own man—a lad I have always liked and trusted; but in common justice and fairness I must admit that he heads that list.

"But there it is—I do not know! I do not *know*. . . . And in all probability I never shall know. It is not a question of punishing a murderer. It is a question that to me seems a hundred times more important. It is the blighting, perhaps, of an honorable man's whole career . . . because of suspicion—a suspicion that I dare not disregard."

Miss Marple coughed and said gently, "Then, Sir Henry, if I understand you rightly, it is young Mr. Templeton who is so much on your mind?"

"Yes, in a sense. It should, in theory, be the same for all four, but that is not actually the case. Dobbs, for instance—suspicion may attach to him in my mind, but it will not actually affect his career.

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Nobody in the village has ever had any idea that old Dr. Rosen's death was anything but an accident. Gertrude is slightly more affected. It must make, for instance, a difference in Fraülein Rosen's attitude toward her. But that, possibly, is not of great importance to her.

"As for Greta Rosen—well, here we come to the crux of the matter. Greta is a very pretty girl and Charles Templeton is a good-looking young man, and for five months they were thrown together with no outside distractions. The inevitable happened. They fell in love—even if they did not come to the point of admitting the fact in words.

"And then the catastrophe happens. It is three months ago now, and a day or two after I returned, Greta Rosen came to see me. She had sold the cottage and was returning to Germany, having finally settled her uncle's affairs. She came to me personally, although she knew I had retired, because it was really about a personal matter she wanted to see me. She beat about the bush a little, then at last it all came out. What did I think? That letter with the German stamp—she had worried about it and worried about it—the one Charles had torn up. Was it all right? Surely it *must* be all right. Of course she believed his story, but—oh, if she only *knew!* If she only knew—for certain."

"You see? The same feeling: the wish to trust—but the horrible lurking suspicion, thrust resolutely to the back of the mind, but persisting nevertheless. I spoke to her with absolute frankness and asked her to do the same. I asked her whether she had been on the point of caring for Charles, and he for her.

"'I think so,' she said. 'Oh, yes, I know it was so. We were so happy. Every day passed so contentedly. We knew—we both knew. There was no hurry—there was all the time in the world. Some day he would tell me he loved me, and I should tell him that I too—ah, but you can guess. And now it is all changed. A black cloud has come between us—when we meet we do not know what to say. . . . We are each saying to ourselves, "If I were *sure!*" That is why, Sir Henry, I beg of you to say to me, "You may be sure, whoever killed your uncle, it was not Charles Templeton." Say it to me! Oh, say it to me, I beg you!'

"And damn it all," cried Sir Henry, bringing down his fist with a bang on the table, "I couldn't say it to her. They'll drift farther and farther apart, those two—with suspicion like a ghost between them—a ghost that can't be laid."

He leaned back in his chair, his face looking tired and gray. He shook his head once or twice despondently.

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"And there's nothing more can be done, unless—" He sat up straight again and a tiny whimsical smile crossed his face—"unless Miss Marple can help us. Can't you, Miss Marple? I've a feeling that letter might be in your line, you know—the one about the Church Social. Doesn't it remind you of something or someone that makes everything perfectly plain? Can't you do something to help two helpless young people who want to be happy?"

Behind the whimsicality there was something earnest in his appeal. He had come to think very highly of the mental powers of this frail old-fashioned maiden lady. He looked across at her with something like hope in his eyes.

Miss Marple coughed and smoothed her lace.

"It does remind me a little of Annie Poultney," she admitted. "Of course the letter is perfectly plain—both to Mrs. Bantry and myself. I don't mean the Church Social letter, but the other one. You living so much in London and not being a gardener, Sir Henry, you would not have been likely to notice."

"Eh?" said Sir Henry. "Notice what?"

Mrs. Bantry reached out a hand and selected a circular. She opened it and read aloud with gusto:

"Dr. Helmuth Spath. Pure lilac, a wonderfully fine flower, carried on exceptionally long and stiff stem. Splendid for cutting and garden decoration. A novelty of striking beauty.

"Edgar Jackson. Beautifully shaped chrysanthemum-like flower of a distinct brick-red color.

"Amos Perry. Brilliant red, highly decorative.

"Tsingtau. Brilliant orange-red, showy garden plant and lasting cut flower.

"Honesty—"

"With a capital H, you remember," murmured Miss Marple.

"Honesty. Rose and white shades, enormous perfect-shaped flower."

Mrs. Bantry flung down the circular, and said with immense explosive force: *"Dahlias!"*

"And their initial letters spell *DEATH,"* explained Miss Marple.

"But the letter came to Dr. Rosen himself," objected Sir Henry.

"That was the clever part of it," said Miss Marple. "That and the warning in it. What would he do, getting a letter from someone he didn't know, full of names he didn't know. Why, of course, toss it over to his secretary."

"Then, after all—"

"Oh, no!" said Miss Marple. *"Not* the secretary. Why, that's what makes it so perfectly clear that it *wasn't* him. He'd never have let that letter be found! And equally, he'd never have destroyed a letter to himself with a German stamp on it. Really, his innocence

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is—if you'll allow me to use the word—just *shining*."

"Then who—"

"Well, it seems almost certain—as certain as anything can be in this world. There was another person at the breakfast table and she would—quite naturally under the circumstances—put out her hand for the letter and read it. And that would be that. You remember that she got a gardening circular by the same post—"

"Greta Rosen," said Sir Henry, slowly. "Then her visit to me—"

"Gentlemen never see through these things," said Miss Marple. "And I'm afraid they often think we old women are—well, cats, to see things the way we do. But there it is. One does know a great deal about one's own sex, unfortunately. I've no doubt there was a barrier between them. The young man felt a sudden inexplicable repulsion. He suspected, purely through instinct, and couldn't hide the suspicion. And I really think that the girl's visit to you was just pure *spite*. She was safe enough really; but she just went out of her way to fix your suspicions definitely on poor Mr. Templeton. You weren't nearly so suspicious of him until after her visit."

"I'm sure it was nothing she said—" began Sir Henry.

"Gentlemen," said Miss Marple calmly, "never see through these things."

"And that girl—" He stopped. "She commits a cold-blooded murder and gets off scot-free!"

"Oh, no, Sir Henry," said Miss Marple. "Not scot-free. Neither you nor I believe that. Remember what you said not long ago. No, Greta Rosen will not escape punishment. To begin with, she must be in with a very queer set of people—blackmailers and terrorists—associates who will do her no good and will probably bring her to a miserable end. As you say, one mustn't waste thoughts on the guilty—it's the innocent who matter. There's that poor old Gertrude, for instance—the one who reminded me of Annie Poultney. Poor Annie Poultney. Fifty years of faithful service and then suspected of making away with Miss Lamb's will, though nothing could be proved. Almost broke the poor creature's faithful heart; and then after she was dead it came to light in the secret drawer of the tea caddy where old Miss Lamb had put it herself for safety. But too late for poor Annie.

"That's what worries me so about that poor old German woman. When one is old, one becomes embittered very easily. I feel much sorrier for her than for Mr. Templeton, who is young and good-looking and probably a favorite with the ladies. You will write to her, won't you, Sir Henry, and just tell her that her innocence is established beyond doubt? Her dear old master dead, and she no doubt

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brooding and feeling herself suspected of . . ."

"I will write, Miss Marple," said Sir Henry. He looked at her curiously. "You know, I shall never quite understand you. Your outlook is always different from what I expect."

"My outlook, I am afraid, is a very petty one," said Miss Marple humbly. "I hardly ever go out of St. Mary Mead."

"And yet you have solved what may be called an International mystery," said Sir Henry. "For you *have* solved it. I am convinced of that."

Miss Marple blushed, then bridled a bit.

"I was, I think, well educated for the standard of my day. My sister and I had a German governess—a Fraülein. A very sentimental creature. She taught us the language of flowers—a forgotten study nowadays, but most charming. A yellow tulip, for instance, means *Hopeless Love,* while a China Aster means *I Die of Jealousy at Your Feet.* That letter was signed Georgina, which I seem to remember is Dahlia in German, and that of course made the whole thing perfectly clear. I wish I could remember the meaning of Dahlia, but alas, that eludes me. My memory is not what it was."

"At any rate it didn't mean *DEATH.*"

"No, indeed. Horrible, is it not? There are very sad things in the world."

"There are," said Mrs. Bantry with a sigh. "It's lucky one has flowers and one's friends."

"She puts us last, you observe," said Dr. Lloyd.

"A man used to send me purple orchids every night to the theater," said Jane dreamily.

"*I Await Your Favors*—that's what orchids mean," said Miss Marple brightly.

Sir Henry gave a peculiar sort of cough and turned his head away.

Miss Marple gave a sudden exclamation.

"I've remembered! Dahlias mean *Treachery and Misrepresentation.*"

"Wonderful," said Sir Henry. "Absolutely wonderful."

And he sighed.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS FLANAGAN**

TITLE: ***Suppose You Were on the Jury***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Imagine yourself on the jury in the Rudd murder trial. Remember that the accused must be guilty "beyond any reasonable doubt." Now read the evidence. What would your verdict have been?*

THE JURY TOOK A LONGER TIME to bring in its verdict than Oliver Amery had expected. It was nearly nine before he had disengaged himself from his abundantly grateful client and nine thirty before he reached his club.

He paused briefly in the washroom to smooth back his sparse gray hair and thus to survey his long thin-boned face, a face which suggested precision of mind and act. Then he took the elevator to the dining room, where he discovered that his friend Randall had dined without him and was now lingering over coffee and Armagnac.

Amery joined him at his table by the window, smiled apologetically, and then, in his dry but arresting voice, persuaded the waiter to bring him salad and an omelette.

"I would judge from your manner," Randall said, "that whatever annoyance you felt at having your dinner delayed was assuaged by a favorable verdict." Randall, a university professor with the face of a fleshy cherub, was much given to ponderous irony of this sort.

"Yes," Amery said briefly. "Not guilty."

"Not guilty?" Randall asked. "It was a criminal trial, then?"

Amery studied him with amiable exasperation. "Don't you ever read the papers?"

"Not if I can help it," Randall replied, with what he believed to be scholarly succinctness.

"It was a murder trial," Amery said. "My client was a man named

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Calvin Rudd. The jury, in its collective wisdom, has decided that he did not murder his wife."

"Your tone suggests a certain reserve on your part. Do you disagree with them?"

"Questions of guilt or innocence lie entirely within the jury's province," Amery said.

"But they are capable of error, surely," Randall said impatiently. "You don't credit them with infallibility."

Amery paused before answering and ran his tongue reflectively along his thin upper lip. He looked out the window to where, six floors below, the path lights of Central Park glimmered up at him. "Had you been on the jury," he said at last, "you would have brought in the same verdict."

"How do I know that?" Randall demanded. "You must tell me something about the case."

"I thought that sort of thing did not interest you."

"Who is not interested in murder?" Randall replied, and folding his hands across his generous waist he settled back expectantly.

There was a longer pause before Amery turned his head and directed his level and impartial gaze at Randall.

"The Rudds," he began, "lived almost directly across the Park. You can see the lights of their apartment building from here. They are—or rather, were—an apparently unexceptionable couple in their early forties. They had very few friends, but these few have all testified as to their exemplary compatibility; if they ever quarrelled, they seem never to have done so in public."

"Shall I regard this fact with suspicion?" asked Randall, who was a bachelor.

"If you like," Amery replied. He had never had much zest for Randall's elephantine humor. "But if you are looking for motive, you should know that although Rudd's means were slender indeed, his wife was a woman of considerable wealth."

"Ah," Randall said.

Amery eyed him with a skepticism born of long courtroom experience. "Mrs. Rudd had one alarming habit, which was the immediate cause of her death. She used to like to walk, very late at night, in Central Park. And she used to take these walks alone."

"That was certainly a dangerous habit," Randall interrupted. "No one has any business being in that Park late at night."

"It proved to be most dangerous for Clara Rudd. Her husband warned her against it frequently and, fortunately for him, before witnesses."

"One hears of robbery, violence, all manner of dreadful happenings."

"One does. And most particularly in that part of the upper Park where she liked to walk."

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Amery stopped for a moment, while the waiter placed his dinner before him. "There had been two near-fatalities in the weeks immediately preceding her death. Armed robbery and assault. I quite agree with you as to its hazards. But I also agree with Mrs. Rudd as to its charms. There is something extraordinarily exciting about the long, quiet paths late at night—about the very threat of the shadowed hedges."

"You are being absurd and paradoxical," Randall said. "Anyone—especially a woman—is asking to be murdered when she does such a thing."

"Yes," Amery said, as he cut into his omelette. "She is asking to be murdered. Mrs. Rudd was knifed to death shortly after midnight on the fourth of August."

"After midnight," Randall echoed, shocked.

"She screamed, and one of the Park policemen reached her almost at once. Too late, unfortunately, to help her. She died before he could get a doctor. The policeman found the weapon near her—one of those switch-blade knives the papers make so much of. She had not been robbed, but the policeman arrived so quickly that a robber would have been frightened away. Because her purse had not been rifled, it was easy to identify her, and in less than a half hour a police officer was sent to her apartment. Rudd received the news with every evidence of the stunned grief which the occasion demanded. He told the officer, who found no reason to question him with particular care, that his wife had left the apartment at about eleven-fifteen. Since then, he had been apprehensively awaiting her return."

"I take it," Randall said, "that the police subsequently found reason to doubt this."

"I'm afraid so," Amery said mildly. "There happens to have been a young couple in the Park that night, near the Ninety-Sixth Street entrance. What they were doing there is a question which was not pressed in court, but speculation is not difficult. The point is that they were so situated that they could observe without being themselves seen, and a minute or two after they heard Clara Rudd's scream they saw a man hurrying out of the Park. He cut across the Park directly under a light and they were thus able to identify him the following day when they saw Rudd's photograph in the papers."

"Dear, dear," said Randall, who was a kindly man for all his mannerisms.

"The police questioned Rudd a second time, naturally, but he persisted in his story. The young man and woman, however, were equally firm in their identification, and they seemed intelligent witnesses. Rudd, I may say, is a man of very distinctive features. Somewhat un-

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pleasant features to say the least."

"Unpleasant features do not make a man a murderer," Randall pointed out in his best classroom manner.

"They make him easy to recognize," Amery said. "And unfortunately a third person, a cab driver, subsequently became convinced that he had seen Rudd cross in front of his cab at about the same time. It was at this point that Rudd felt the urgent need for legal counsel."

"I can well believe that. Did you persuade him to tell the truth?"

"The truth?" Amery asked, looking pensively at his salad. "He continued to maintain that he had not left his apartment that night, if that is what you mean."

"Despite the fact that three witnesses contradicted him?"

"Exactly. Despite that fact."

"That seems to me most unlikely," Randall observed.

"It seemed so to the State, too. With the result that Rudd was placed on trial for his life. But trial is one thing. To sentence a man to death is another. Would you have found him guilty upon their evidence?"

"Well," Randall said, somewhat uncomfortably. "I didn't say that."

"But had you been on the jury, that is what you would have been called upon to decide. You know the phrase, surely. Was he guilty beyond any reasonable doubt? The State tells you that he was, and they bring forward three identifying witnesses. Their testimony creates very grave doubts as to his innocence. Were they mistaken? Perhaps not. But a man's life hangs on that 'perhaps.' If you killed him, would you never be troubled by doubts graver and more terrible still?"

"If they were *certain* they saw him—" Randall began.

"Two lovers who caught a glimpse of a man rushing past them at midnight, and a cab driver who came forward later." Amery pointed out the window. "Look down there and conjure up in your mind the two pictures that would have been presented to you had you been on that jury. In both pictures Mrs. Rudd is taking her solitary walk. But in one she is the victim of a crime which has become all too frequent in that park. You said yourself that a woman taking such a walk is asking to be murdered. In the other picture it is her husband—with whom, so far as we know, she has always been on the best of terms—who is skulking in the shrubbery, knife in hand."

Randall, his gaze following Amery's gesturing hand, looked down into the park, a pattern of darkness and uncertain lights.

"And the jury," Amery said, correctly reading his friend's silence, "was equally unwilling to live with such doubts. Such 'reasonable' doubts."

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The phrase, as he used it, had a ring which caught Randall's ear, and turning from the window he looked curiously at Amery and then said flatly, "But not you. You have no doubt whatever that Rudd killed his wife."

"I?" Amery asked. "You forget that I was representing him, defending him."

Randall waved pudgy hands to dissipate such niceties. "Why?" he asked. "Why are you so certain of his guilt?"

Amery turned an unlighted cigarette in his long, spatulate fingers. "There was reasonable doubt," he said. "On the basis of the evidence admitted, I would have voted to acquit."

But Randall, unsatisfied, continued to stare at him with owlish solemnity. At last a wry smile pulled at the corners of Amery's mouth.

"Of course," he said, "Not all facts are admitted as evidence."

"For example?"

"Clara Rudd," Amery said, "was my client's third wife. All three died violently. All three, in fact, were murdered."

Amery briefly savored his friend's astonishment. Then, by way of rewarding his own virtuosity, he ordered a brandy.

"I cannot believe that I heard you correctly," Randall said, swinging all his massive and simple-souled irony into play. "Do you mean to tell me that this is the *third* time Rudd has fallen under suspicion of murder?"

"I do not. I simply told you an indisputable fact. All three of his wives were murdered."

"And no mention was made of this at the trial?"

"None whatever," Amery replied, somewhat complacently.

"Surely this is evidence of the most pertinent sort," Randall said rather heatedly.

"Do you find it easier now to believe that Rudd was guilty?"

"I most certainly do."

"That is precisely why the fact was not admitted into evidence."

"It has always been my opinion," Randall said obliquely, "that a gift for paradox is the most annoying of conversational virtues."

"In this instance," Amery said, "you must give credit for the paradox to the law itself, not to me." He smiled indulgently at his friend's ill-contained indignation. "Perhaps you would like to know something of Rudd's unfortunate career."

"Unfortunate, indeed!" Randall said. "I would be most interested."

"Yes," Amery said. "I thought you would. I should begin, then, by telling you that Rudd was a foundling and that his life, until he was sixteen, was spent in an institution in Boston."

"Under the circumstances," Randall said, "I am not prepared to enlist my sympathies in his behalf."

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"Nor did I solicit them. Rudd's career, if I may call it that, began when, at the age of seventeen, he took a job as clerk to a hardware dealer named Munden. The Mundens, who were a childless couple, took a liking to the young man—so great a liking that two years later they legally adopted him. The relationship did not last long. Mrs. Munden, who had been ailing for some time, died six months later. The following year, Munden was robbed and killed on the street one afternoon as he was taking a large cash deposit to the bank."

Randall drew in his breath sharply.

"This was the first of Rudd's various misfortunes," Amery said blandly. "He inherited the business, to be sure, but he conducted it with very indifferent success. The deaths of the couple who had befriended him seem to have moved him deeply."

"Three wives and two foster parents," Randall said indignantly. "This is really too much!"

"Mrs. Munden died of natural causes," Amery said. He was somewhat apologetic about this. "I have said nothing about Rudd's personality, though no doubt it plays a part in his history. His appearance is not pleasant—a huge, hulking fellow with a disproportionately small head and singularly large hands. He strikes most people as shy and indeed, during his years with the Mundens, he made no friends at all. You can imagine, therefore, the void which they left in his life. He is far from lacking in warm feelings, however. He responds to the least degree of sympathy with an almost insatiable friendliness. I became almost painfully aware of this during the trial and while I was preparing his defense."

"It is difficult not to feel grateful to someone who is trying to save your life."

"No doubt," Amery said. "At any rate, after Munden's death, Rudd began filling his evenings in the way lonely people usually do—concerts, lectures, and so on. In this fashion he met a young woman named Theresa Farrell, who subsequently became the first Mrs. Rudd."

Randall shuddered with as much delicacy as his heavy form permitted.

"Theresa Farrell," Amery said, "was a schoolteacher. She was a quiet girl, by all accounts, but not shy, as Rudd is. Open and outgoing, rather. But she was attracted to Rudd, and he to her, and so they married. The marriage was a tonic to Rudd's spirits. He began to manage his store more efficiently and even to make a few tentative friendships. All this was shattered by the early death of the first Mrs. Rudd."

"Her death," Randall repeated, underlining the euphemism.

"Oddly enough," Amery proceeded equably, "she died in al-

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most the same circumstances as did the third Mrs. Rudd. She was murdered in Fenway Park late one August afternoon, robbery being the apparent motive. There had been three such murders recently in the Boston area and the method of operation seemed to the police identical. The criminal was subsequently apprehended, tried, and executed. Before he died he made a confession."

Randall frowned in sudden puzzlement. Amery paused to thank the waiter for his brandy. As he warmed it between his hands, he studied the room which the lateness of the hour had almost emptied.

Then he said, "Not a full confession, however. He died protesting that he had not killed Theresa Rudd." Amery sipped his brandy. "Rudd's grief brought him almost to the point of breakdown. Because Boston had too many unhappy memories for him, he left the city and moved to Washington, where he opened another hardware store. He changed his name, incidentally, and nothing was known in Washington of his previous experiences. Had it been otherwise, the police might have examined more suspiciously the death of his second wife, five years later."

"Another robbery?" Randall asked.

"If you ever read the newspaper, you would recall Washington's famous sniper—the unbalanced person who used to fire into lighted windows."

"Ah," Randall said. "And he, too, confessed to all his crimes save one?"

"He was never captured, unfortunately. But it may interest you to know that in all his other crimes the sniper used the same weapon, a high-powered hunting rifle. Rudd's wife was killed with a weapon of the same range but the ballistics markings on the bullet made it plain that it was fired from a different rifle. The police were troubled by this circumstance, naturally, but there was nothing to connect Rudd with her death. They had been a most devoted couple."

"As their few friends testified," Randall remarked.

"Yes," Amery said. "You are beginning to catch the spirit of the case. After the death of his first wife it took Rudd a long time to come out of his shell—nearly five years. She was a waitress in the diner where he often took his meals. She told one of her friends that she felt sorry for Rudd."

"Poor woman," Randall said.

"Poor in both senses of the word. It must be clear to you that if Rudd murdered these people, he did not murder for profit, although it is true that he gained his business by Munden's death and that Clara Rudd was a wealthy woman. It is, indeed, curious to reflect upon the variousness of the

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people who have felt themselves drawn to Rudd."

"It is even more interesting," Randall said, "to reflect upon the similarity of their fates."

"Yes, there is that, of course," Amery agreed.

"Which brings us to the third Mrs. Rudd," Randall said.

Amery shrugged. "Rudd moved to New York. He began going to concerts again. Music means a great deal to him. One day he fell into conversation with the woman sitting next to him." Amery drank and then rested his glass on the table.

"Four people," Randall said. He shook his head angrily, as if to dispel an ugly image. "And you mean to tell me that the State did not somehow bring this dreadful story to the attention of the jury?"

"It tried to, of course, but I objected and my objection was upheld by the learned judge, as I knew it would be. As the State also knew, for that matter."

"This is clearly intolerable," Randall said, in his best Doctor Samuel Johnson manner.

"Is it?" Amery asked. "He was on trial for the murder of Clara Rudd and for that only. Let us grant that he killed his first two wives. Does this prove that he killed the third?"

"It makes it much more likely."

"Put it another way. It makes us much more likely to *think* him guilty."

"As you will. It amounts to the same thing."

"On the contrary, a very important principle of law is involved. Let me give you an example. Four women, including Theresa Rudd, were killed in a Boston park. The murders followed closely one upon the other and the circumstances were identical. A man was seized and taken into custody. Suppose he had been tried for the murder of Theresa Rudd only and that the prosecution, in order to bring that crime home to him, had been allowed to exhibit proof to the jury that he had murdered three other women in exactly the same way. They might well have sentenced a man to death for a crime of which he was entirely innocent."

"A small loss," Randall said.

"Yes, if we are agreed that a prisoner's right to a fair trial is a trifling matter."

"I concede you have a point," Randall said after some reluctance.

"Thank you."

"Yes, but a man can be tried for more murders than one. Why wasn't Rudd tried for the murder of all three of his wives?"

"For several reasons, one of which should be obvious even to you."

"Thank you," Randall replied, returning the compliment.

"Of these alleged murders one was committed in Boston, one in the District of Columbia, and one in New York. He was being tried

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for the one committed in New York."

Randall's face assumed the grimness of an honest man determined to cut to justice through legal jungles. "But there is no reason why he cannot be tried in those cities, is there?"

"None whatever, save lack of evidence."

"And once again, the fact that he committed a murder in New York is not evidence?"

"The fact is that he did not commit a murder in New York. A jury has just determined that."

Randall rested his hands firmly on the arms of his chair. "And yet you and I are morally certain, are we not, that he was responsible for the deaths of all his wives and for that of his foster father as well?"

Amery drew a thoughtful finger along the rim of his glass. "I should not like to see anyone of my acquaintance enter into a close alliance with Mr. Rudd."

"For my part," Randall said, "I should not like even to come near him. He has a singularly fatal personality."

"He is singularly clever," Amery said, "Although his appearance and manner belie the fact. To all appearances, Munden was murdered while taking a deposit to his bank; both Clara and Theresa Rudd were killed by the sort of criminal who haunts large parks; and the second wife was killed by a notorious sniper. In all cases the crimes followed closely upon similar ones."

"In each case it seemed as if someone else had committed the murder. Is that what you mean?"

"More than that. Any murderer worth his salt is likely to set about presenting the police with an alternative to his own guilt. He may make the death seem natural, or the result of accident, or, as you say, the result of the action of some other person. Rudd, however, was very choosy about that other person. He saw to it that each murder would have all the earmarks of what the police call a 'pattern' of murders. Not many systematic murderers are that ingenious."

"Systematic?" Randall asked.

"It is a technical term," Amery said, smiling in self-deprecation. "If a particular kind of accident has happened frequently to the same man, the proof of each additional case decreases the improbability of accident. Strictly speaking, it cannot be said to apply to Rudd, but there is no doubt in my mind—nor, I take it in yours—that Rudd has been using, with lamentable success, the same method of averting suspicion from himself."

"We are agreed on that, at least," Randall said.

"The disturbing point," Amery said, "is the apparent absence of motive. In nearly every instance of

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which I have knowledge, systematic murders are committed for profit. Now, it is true that Rudd gained control of a modest business when Munden was killed and a sizeable fortune when Clara Rudd was killed. But surely no benefit accrued to him as a result of the other two deaths—a schoolteacher and a waitress."

"Perhaps money was not the motive in any of the cases," Randall said. "Perhaps there was another motive."

"I cannot imagine what it was," Amery said. He picked up his brandy glass and emptied it.

"He killed the man who befriended him," Randall said slowly. "Then the schoolteacher who took him out of his loneliness, the waitress who talked to him in the diner, and the woman who shared his love of music."

"Precisely," Amery said. "They had nothing in common except the one fact that he had good reason to feel grateful to each of them."

"Perhaps that was the motive."

Amery stared at his friend for an incredulous moment, then laughed. His was a particularly brilliant laugh and in a courtroom it was capable of bursting like a rocket through clouds of witnesses.

"He killed them because he was grateful to them?" Amery asked, as his eyes, merry with malice, sought out Randall's. "That is a most tenuous supposition."

"I thought of it while you were telling me of him," Randall said. "What other motive could he possibly have had?"

Amery picked up his glass again, and then, perceiving that it was empty, set it down irritably. "It is too late at night for sophistry of that sort, Randall," he said.

"But I am quite serious. Don't you see that it gives a certain dreadful logic to his acts?"

Amery laughed again, more harshly. "The logic is dreadful, to be sure."

"What a provoking person you are. Why enmesh me in these speculations if you are willing to cut them short?"

"Because you asked me to," Amery replied. "But the hour is well advanced."

And indeed it was. The waiter hovered sullenly by the wall, drawing his cloth slowly between his hands.

"We are just around the corner from my apartment," Randall said, "where a fire and brandy and some excellent cigars would be at our disposal."

But Amery shook his head. "I'm sure that your theory is quite ingenious, but it must await another day."

"Well," Randall said, somewhat nettled, "if you have that little interest in your own case—" He broke off when he noticed that Amery's gaze had wandered to the Park below. "I had forgotten," he said. "You must be tired."

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Amery turned away from the window, saying with curious sharpness, "My interest in the Rudd case ended when the judge discharged him." He gathered up his cigarettes and lighter and slipped them in his pocket.

He was so quiet as they left the building that Randall, certain that Amery was more tired than he realized, studied him solicitously.

They stopped at Randall's corner and he said, "I won't ask you up for a drink, then. You must get straight to bed."

"Yes," Amery said, abstractedly. "I must do that. I will be busy tomorrow."

"Another murder case?"

"Good heavens, no. How lurid you must think my practice. A most difficult will has come up for probate."

"Ah," Randall said indulgently. "We must talk about that one too, sometime." And touching his friend's arm he turned away.

Amery stood quietly for a moment, his hands buried in the pockets of his coat, as Randall bustled off. Then he walked toward the cab stand.

To reach it, however, he had to pass the entrance to the Park, and at the entrance he paused.

He had not been talking at random when he had told Randall that the shadowed silences of the Park held their charms for him. And never more so than now, it seemed, for after a brief glance at the waiting cabs he turned sharply and walked into the Park.

He walked briskly and was halfway through the park when a figure loomed suddenly before him.

"You told me that you liked to walk here, just as Clara did," Calvin Rudd said, as he fell in beside him. "I took a chance and waited for you."

After a pause in which a variety of alarming thoughts raced chaotically through his mind, Amery said, "But how did you know I would come here tonight?"

"Oh, I couldn't have been sure," Rudd said pleasantly. "But you did say when you left me that you were going to have dinner at your club and so I took a chance and waited. I thought that being so close to the Park and remembering the trial, the notion might occur to you."

"Yes," Amery said, walking more rapidly now and looking forward to the next path light.

"Clara could never resist it," Rudd said. "She used to look out at the park from her window and the next thing I knew she would be slipping on her coat. But it is so dangerous. I warned her about it time and again."

"Yes," Amery said. "I recall that you did."

"You don't mind my waiting for you, do you?" Rudd asked.

"No, no. Of course not," Amery said quickly. "As you say, it is not

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safe, really. I am glad to have someone with me."

"I felt that I had to talk with you," Rudd said, swinging gloved hands together as though to ward off the sudden fall chill. "You didn't give me a chance in the courtroom to tell you how grateful I am. There I was, locked up and with Clara dead. You were the only true friend I had left in the whole world."

He moved a hand across his eyes.

"Not at all," Amery said. "There is no need for that."

"But there is," Rudd said. "All through the trial I've been waiting to tell you. Why, you saved my life, didn't you?"

Amery started to speak, then stopped and shook his head.

"Yes, you did," Rudd went on, and as he spoke he swung in front of Amery. "I don't think I've ever been more grateful to anyone. You saved my life."

He reached out his arms and caught hold of Amery. To someone watching, it might have seemed that he had reached out to embrace him.

But there was no one watching.

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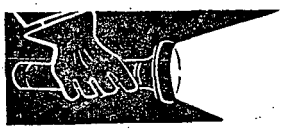

BEST MYSTERIES OF 1957

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

In view of the fact that "a mystery" (or "a suspense novel") has come to mean almost any story with a compelling narrative, this has been a good year for the field; and this list of 25 "best" titles could be nearly doubled without a marked let-down in quality. But for Haycraftian purists, who insist upon the detective story proper, it may well have been a disappointing period.

The Detective Story, as practised twenty years ago in what John Strachey called the Golden Age of Allingham, Blake, Innes, and Marsh, combines the deductive pursuit of crime with a full-bodied novel of character and milieu; and even in England this precise balance of plotting and writing seems scarce today. The year's finest specimen came from a writer who has grown in stature with each book:

WHAT ROUGH BEAST, *by John Trench* (Macmillan, $2.95)

The Eccentric Detective, who brought us such joy in ancient days, from Sherlock Holmes to Drury Lane, has all but vanished under the pressure of modern realism. We may still delight, however, in Arthur W. Upfield's Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte (see below) and in the incomparably eccentric Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrange Bradley, in

WATSON'S CHOICE, *by Gladys Mitchell* (Penguin, 65¢)

The Private Eye, too, seems to be giving way to everyday policeman or nonprofessionals forced to turn detective to solve their own dilemmas. But the embittered, harsh, observant, compassionate eye still exists in the person of Paul Pine in

THE TASTE OF ASHES, *by Howard Browne* (Simon & Schuster, $2.95)

The Procedural Police Novel, though its adumbrations go far back in literary history, is the particular contribution of the 1950s to suspense. This year saw good specimens from John Creasey and Maurice Procter in England, from Jonathan Craig and Milton K. Ozaki here, and outstandingly:

THE CON MAN, *by Ed McBain* (Permabooks, 25¢)
GIDEON'S NIGHT, *by J. J. Marric* (Harper, $2.95)

Espionage contributed much of the season's suspense, including the solid paperback thrillers of Edward S. Aarons and Stephen Marlowe and

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quieter hardcover tension by John Appleby and Michael Innes. Top-ranking spy-stunners:

BE SHOT FOR SIXPENCE, by Michael Gilbert (Harper, $2.95)
STOPOVER: TOKYO, by J. P. Marquand (Little, Brown, $3.95)

Malice Domestic evokes as much breath-taking peril as the most sinister spies can generate in

BUNNY LAKE IS MISSING, by Evelyn Piper (Harper, $2.95)

Humor successfully relieved the tensions of murder in novels by A. A. Fair, Patrick Quentin, and the late Craig Rice, but nowhere more warmly than in

DEATH OF AN OLD SINNER, by Dorothy Salisbury Davis (Scribner's, $2.75)

The Novel of suspense can reach a point at which it is impossible to say whether this is a straight novel with an unusually strong plot or a thriller with unusually strong novelistic values. For example:

THE SCAPEGOAT, by Daphne du Maurier (Doubleday, $3.95)
AN AIR THAT KILLS, by Margaret Millar (Random, $3.50)
THE LORD HAVE MERCY, by Shelley Smith (Harper, $2.95)

Social Problems were handled surprisingly well in the suspense form by authors who never forgot the reader's primary interest in story and character. Amidst a welter of fashionable quickies on juvenile delinquency, Brackett displayed genuine insight and Carleton came up with a welcome word in favor of youth. Fittingly in the Year of Little Rock, two of our best hard-and-fast writers contributed to interracial understanding.

THE TIGER AMONG US, by Leigh Brackett (Crime Club, $2.95)
THE NIGHT OF THE GOOD CHILDREN, by Marjorie Carleton (Morrow, $2.95)
ROOM TO SWING, by Ed Lacy (Harper, $2.95)
ODDS AGAINST TOMORROW, by William P. McGivern (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)

Unclassifiable are three of the year's most interesting books: Asimov's science fiction novel, which poses the season's most formal deductive puzzle; Carr's time-travel fantasy of the pioneer days of Scotland Yard; and van Gulik's entrancing (if possibly only to specialists) adaptation of ancient Chinese themes.

THE NAKED SUN, by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, $2.95)
FIRE, BURN!, by John Dickson Carr (Harper, $3.50)
THE CHINESE MAZE MURDERS, by Robert van Gulik (Lounz, $3)

First Novels were, as usual, numerous, but included no sensational debuts—though one looks forward with interest to the further work of Ovid Demaris, Elizabeth Fenwick, Peter Held, Ken Lewis, William L.

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Rohde, and F. L. Wallace. Much the most satisfactory beginner's book, and one that might as easily have been listed above under *Espionage,* was

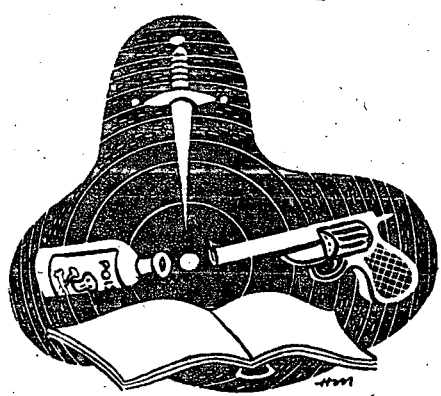
KNOCK AND WAIT A WHILE, *by William Rawle Weeks* (Houghton Mifflin, $3.50)

Short Stories and Novelets were, to the particular joy of this department, unusually frequent in book form. Some 30 volumes (new and old, specialized or mixed) of shorter criminous stories must set a post-war record—and quality, it must be confessed, sometimes dipped as low as in the spate of war-time publishing. But a few, at least, were as good as the most captious reader could demand:

THE ALBATROSS, *by Charlotte Armstrong* (Coward-McCann, $3.50)
APPLEBY TALKS AGAIN, *by Michael Innes* (Dodd, Mead, $2.95)
THREE FOR THE CHAIR, *by Rex Stout* (Viking, $2.95)
FOR LOVE OR MONEY, *by the Mystery Writers of America, selected by Dorothy Gardiner* (Crime Club, $3.50)

The Book of the Year is usually most easily nominated when it comes from a striking new talent, or when a familiar writer tries an unexpected fresh departure. But the nomination is possibly most gratifying when an Established Old Pro, who is never disappointing, simply outdoes himself by producing a highly characteristic and virtually perfect book, which may represent him in all future critical checklists, such as:

THE BUSHMAN WHO CAME BACK, *by Arthur W. Upfield* (Crime Club, $2.95)



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: LOREN GOOD

TITLE: *And the Desert Shall Blossom*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Nevada

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Ben and Tom were tough old desert rats. They loved their tumbledown, unpainted cabin "a thousand miles from nowhere." Even the Sheriff couldn't force them back to civilization. . . .*

CRACK-JOINTED AND UNPAINTED, the cabin they had built for themselves sat at the edge of the desert. Four years ago, during one of the short spells of *bonanza* that broke up their longer and more frequent periods of *borrasac,* they had even added a floor and a porch.

The two old men sat watching the harsh desert grow soft, intimate, and immeasurably promising in the rose and saffron sunset, its immensity reducing gradually in the dwindling light.

Ben Wilson shifted heavily in the chair he had made from juniper boughs and barrel staves, and repeated, "I just ain't goin', Tom. Even if I have to fight that damn sheriff and all twelve of his depities."

"Me neither." His partner nodded in taciturn agreement. Tom Tye was not as gray as his companion on the swaybacked little porch, but his face, too, had been molded by the desert into a relief map of time; only his hawk nose remained relatively untouched—it still jutted aggressively into the future.

"It ain't a case of we have to go," Ben persisted. "We can make out all right in our own cabin, just like we been doin'." Seeking reassurance, he added, "Anyway, a old-folks home ain't no place for desert rats. Wouldn't be no room to spit,

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and—and—just too danged many *people.*" Ben placed an emphasis on the last word that was well understood by his partner.

Tom nodded again, looking out past his small feet propped on the porch rail to a tiny dust cloud, far down on the faint double trail that served as a road to their cabin.

"Besides," Ben pointed with the stem of his old clay pipe, "we gotta stay here till she blooms, at least once."

Four paces from the porch was a rosebush, sagging limply in the thin desert air. It clung despairingly to the sterile soil, its few leaves drooping gray and dusty. In the catalogue it had looked glossy and alive, with great red blooms the size of cabbages, but here in the desert it held life in a feeble grip. Night and morning it received a rationed pail of water from the homestead's scanty supply, and the old men had made for it the only bit of cultivated ground within eye-range. Yet without a miracle it was plainly doomed. Each man sat and thought a while of the miracle they needed so badly.

Tom turned to the trail again and searched with his sharp old eyes until he was sure that the slowly moving cloud of dust meant a car, and that the car was on their road. Milton, the rancher from the mountain range behind them, was their one regular visitor. He had brought in their month's supply of grub and tobacco only last week. Tom sighed as he realized what the car meant, then he rose silently. He brushed past Ben and walked out to a stunted juniper just beyond the spring, where he had hidden a bottle of whiskey.

Quietly he returned, fetched two thick glasses from the cabin, and sloshed each half full.

"Mebbe not the best," he said, "but powerful."

Ben looked at him questioningly. Tom grunted himself back into his chair, then waved his arm toward the dust cloud, large enough now to be seen clearly in the gathering gloom. He pointed at it with his whole hand, all fingers extended, as an Indian points when he is serious. "Car comin'," he said.

Ben looked for a long moment, then took a big pull at his glass. "Suppose it's that nosey sheriff?" he asked hopelessly.

"Wouldn't be Milton." Tom said. "He was here last week."

Ben tilted his glass again and felt a fierce joy in the savage bite the liquor took at his insides. "Like I said," he grumbled, "I ain't goin'."

Tom, nodding, refilled the glasses. They sipped at their whiskey and waited, watching the desert grow somber and shapeless again as the light lifted away.

When the approaching car clattered and bumped itself into earshot, Tom spoke. "Not the sheriff's car, neither."

Ben listened a moment. "Sounds like they's somethin' turrible wrong

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with the machinery, don't it?" he chuckled.

The straining vehicle gave up completely a hundred yards from the house. They could hear it still popping and hissing, and the voice of a man swearing thinly in futile desperation. Then a car door slammed, and they heard the uncertain steps of a pavement dweller blundering up the path. The stranger was a bulky-shouldered man in city clothes.

"You guys got a car?" he demanded.

Ben rose and started into the cabin to light the lamp. "Nope. Ain't got a car. Got a mule. Just about as old as we are. I'll make some coffee."

"How about some food too?"

Ben stiffened at the stranger's tone. "Sure. Come on in. I'll rassle up a bait of somethin'."

While he fussed expertly at the stove, Ben introduced Tom and himself, then paused politely for the stranger to identify himself. He didn't. Ben and Tom tried the silent treatment, sitting and watching with pointed interest while the man in the striped suit ate his way hurriedly through a platter of fried potatoes, beans, and bacon. He ignored his coffee during the early part of his solitary meal, obviously preferring long draughts of Tom's saw-toothed whiskey.

"Sounded like they was somethin' gone real wrong with your car," Ben finally ventured.

The stranger shoved back his plate, gulped some coffee, and stood up. "Yeah. You guys sure you ain't got a car? Truck? Pick-up? Anything with wheels that'll get me out of here?

"No car," Ben said patiently. "Just a old mule."

"Can a guy ride a mule? Like a horse?"

"Some mules is broke for it," Ben admitted. "This'n ain't. She's only broke to pack. No saddle, neither."

"How do you old coots get to town?"

Ben squinted, pursed his lips, and rocked back and forth on his boot heels while he considered.

"We manage."

"All right, all right. I've got to get to Reno. How do I get there from here?"

"If that car of yours won't run, I guess you walk."

"How far is it?"

"Two and a half days, the way Tom and I walk it."

"How long with that mule?"

"'Bout three days," Tom chuckled. "She's got her own idees about gettin' there."

"Look," the stranger said tensely, "let's not waste a lot of time. I've got to get to Reno. You know the way from here. Okay. So I'll make it pay you to get me there in good shape. That's simple enough, ain't it? You got something better to do?"

"Easiest way," Ben offered, "is

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to walk back to the highway. You're eight, ten miles off it, here. It's all downhill, and you could prob'ly catch a ride before morning."

"No highway." The stranger said flatly.

"Tom," Ben asked, "you want to go to Reno?"

Tom Tye's black Indian eyes flickered in the lamplight and a tiny grin worked its way gingerly across his flat mouth. "Got somethin' better to do," he decided. "Got to water a rosebush."

"Reckon you'll need help, too." Ben nodded gravely and turned to the stranger. "Come mornin', we'll be glad to show you the trail and fix you up with some grub and water. Don't reckon we'll be goin' with you."

The intruder jammed his hand under his coat and jerked out a heavy-barreled automatic. "We're all going to Reno together," he said. "I'm not going to stumble all over the desert out there by myself." He waved the gun with a businesslike, experienced air. "You and Pop here get some food together, and go saddle up that mule, or whatever the hell it is you do to mules, and let's get started."

Tom was outraged. "Why, you young . . ."

Something tightened in the stranger's face and screwed it out of shape. The automatic leaped out to arm's length, smashing Tom hard across the cheek. The blow was meant to be a warning—painful, not crippling; but the gunman's arm, which had been tense too long, went out of control. Tom reeled back, blood spurting from his torn cheek. He fell back heavily.

Ben's voice, when it finally edged into the sudden deep silence of the room, was as soft and toneless as a breeze from the barren land outside. "He's the man that knows the trail. He'll need some fixin' up if he's to go with us." He turned and went into his room.

"Don't give me a bad time," the gunman warned. "One or two more stiffs won't make a damned bit of difference to me."

"All right, mister. You've got the edge."

Ben returned tearing strips from a clean white rag as he walked. One of the strips he dipped in the pail of water by the stove. He brought a big bottle of liniment from their meager medicine shelf and knelt down to wipe the bloody face of his friend, his back turned to the sweating man in the city clothes.

When he felt Ben's shadow fall across his face, Tom's eyes opened to thin slits of glittering awareness. Without speaking, Ben tried to tell him by looking down at his own waistband. The dark eyes of the Indian searched for a moment, then closed. Slowly, with the patience of centuries of training and the skill of a coiling snake, Tom's

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arm slid up until his hand slipped under Ben's old denim jacket.

Ben moved a little, trying to draw in his stomach and ease the pressure on the barrel of the old Colt's single-action revolver as Tom eased it free into his hand.

"C'mon, c'mon," the stranger moved restlessly. "Pour a bucket of water on the old goat and let's get outa here. I ain't got forever."

Ben placed a hand flat on the floor as though to push himself up. Instead, he dropped flat across Tom's belly, making himself as thin as he could. Tom jerked his head up and fired over Ben's back, putting the massive, old-fashioned bullet squarely in the center of their visitor's chest.

After a little while Ben pried himself to his hands and knees.

Tom grinned up at him, a little crookedly from his torn face. "Ben," he complained, "you're gettin' heavy."

Three weeks later Sheriff Thompson finally got up to see them. He hallooed and waved, then inspected the abandoned car before he came up to the porch.

"The owner of that car," he asked, "he still around?"

"Nope." Ben sounded positive.

"You fellas see him?"

"Yep."

"Well?"

"Dunno anything about him. Said his car was broke down and he had to go to Reno." Ben waved his arm vaguely toward the desert.

"Walking? From here to Reno?"

Tom shrugged. "Quite a walk, all right. His business."

"Mighta went down to the highway and caught a ride," Ben added.

"No. He didn't go back to the highway." The sheriff was sure. "We've had every car checked through for the past three weeks. This fella is wanted for everything in the book. The California boys chased him all the way to the border, and I see somebody put a bullet in his motor at that last roadblock. No wonder his car broke down. You sure he's not around here?"

"Said he had to meet somebody." Tom cleared his throat. "Real tough hombre, eh?"

"I'll say. The report I got says they can prove at least two murders if they can get him back for trial. Name's Carmody, Tony Carmody. Has a finger in practically every racket on the coast." As he talked, Thompson became acutely aware of the occasional glances between the two old men and their elaborate nonchalance. He moved casually across the porch and up to the cabin door. He drew his revolver, whipped the door open, and leaped inside in one motion. "Come out of there, Carmody—you're covered!" he yelled.

The two grizzled heads on the porch faced each other in amazement. Ben blunted a snort of laughter with his hand. Tom's eyes

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crinkled and his stomach moved a little in silent chuckles.

"We ain't got him hid out in there, Sheriff," Ben called. "Honest."

The sheriff's voice came from a room inside, where they heard him rattling his way through a quick inspection. "Didn't really think you had, but I thought a city man like that would be too smart to try a two-three day walk across the desert. Figured he might have holed up here and had the drop on you two, so you couldn't tell me about it. He's pretty cagey. I couldn't take a chance on it."

Evidently satisfied that Carmody was gone, Sheriff Thompson sat down with them on the porch.

"Well," he asked, "you two ready to go back down to town with me?"

"You bring that paper says we have to?" Ben asked stiffly.

"Nope. No paper."

"Then we ain't goin'."

"Look, you cantankerous old goats," the sheriff said fondly, "we've been over this a hundred times. You're rough and tough old desert rats, sure, and you think you wouldn't like it down there. How do you know? You won't even try it. You're a cause for worry away up here a thousand miles from nowhere, and there's a place all fixed up for you down below. You'd still be your own boss, you'd get decent food three times a day, and be near a doctor in case anything went wrong. What would you do up here if something really went haywire?"

Tom tried to grin, and winced.

"You see?" the sheriff went on, "Look at that face of yours, Tom. What did you do, use your head for a single-jack?"

"Got drunk and fell off the porch," Tom said happily.

"Ran into a door," Ben muttered.

"Whatever it was, it should have been fixed up by a doctor days ago, from the looks of it." The sheriff sighed in exasperation. "Looks like you've been pistol-whipped," he chuckled. "You and Ben been fighting?"

Tom felt he had to say something. He cleared his throat and blinked. "You see, it was like this . . ."

"That'd be a dull story no matter how you told it," Ben cut in. "Why don't you go hunt up that bottle of yours? Sheriff Thompson must be thirsty, too."

Tom stopped in mid-word and nodded. "Good idee," he said emphatically. "Best idee of all day."

While they sipped warm whiskey and water, the sheriff patiently went over, again, his familiar set of arguments to convince them they should return at least to the rim of civilization. They nodded their heads to show interest in his conversation, applauded his reasoning, blinked, but said nothing.

". . . at least come on down and

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let a doctor take a look at that face of yours, Tom. It wouldn't mean you'd have to stay . . ."

"Healin' up fine, just fine." Tom was polite and adamant.

"Well . . ." The sheriff slapped his knees and rose. "You're a pair of stubborn, hide-bound old goats. I ought to bat you over the head and drag you in by the seat of your pants."

"Thankee just the same, Sheriff." Ben nodded gravely, "We know how kindly it's meant."

"Well, when you're ready, come on down—or let me know and I'll come get you."

As the sheriff walked down to his car Tom muttered, "Hated to lie to Thompson. Real nice fella."

"Wasn't really no lie," Ben said. "That fella did say he had to go to Reno. We didn't say exactly where he went. Wasn't no sense of havin' the sheriff run clear up here to handle somethin' we'd already taken care of. No sense in us goin' clear down there to answer questions we already know the answers to. Couldn't have packed him in, neither—he wouldn't have kept in this heat, and you know what that mule does when she smells blood."

Tom nodded in reluctant agreement, and the two old men turned together to look at their freshly spaded garden, where the rosebush now stood straight and strong, healthily green and beautiful in the clear desert air. It looked as if, some day, it would have great red blooms the size of cabbages.

NEXT MONTH . . .

JOHN DICKSON CARR's	*Death by Invisible Hands*
FREDERICK NEBEL's	*No Kid Stuff*
ROBERT BLOCH's	*Is Betsey Blake Still Alive?*
THOMAS WALSH's	*A Chump To Hold the Bag*
ELLERY QUEEN's	*Object Lesson*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ELLERY QUEEN**
TITLE:	***No Place To Live***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Ellery Queen and Inspector Queen
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The second of Ellery's conflicts with modern problems—this one, the lack of living quarters. The third in the series—lack of schoolrooms—will appear next month.*

WHEN THEY ENTERED THE FLAT they were after someone else altogether. But in one of the rooms off the center hall they found a man with half his head blown off, and over him a pretty blonde with a cheap new wedding band on her left hand holding the cannon.

Sergeant Velie took the gun from her by the barrel delicately, and Inspector Queen looked at her ring and said to her, "And you're Mrs.—?"

"Graham," the girl said. "June Graham."

Ellery caught June Graham as she fell. . . .

Twenty-four hours earlier Brock was on his unmade bed doping the next day's fourth race when his landlord came to call.

Brock went out and opened the apartment door. He had a broken nose and he was dressed in pink and brown.

"If it ain't Mr. Finger," Brock said, surprised. "You come to investigate my cockroaches personally?"

Mr. Finger stepped into Brock's flat in ominous silence. Brock hustled him into the dirty bedroom and shut the door.

"What's on your mind?" Brock said.

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"Rent." Mr. Finger was small and fat and wore a big ruby on his right hand. He owned eight apartment houses on the upper West Side. "*Their* rent, Mr. Brock."

Brock followed the line of his landlord's fat thumb and it told him the whole sad story. "So Jerky talked," Brock said.

"If you're meaning my super, yeah," Mr. Finger said in a chilling voice. "Look, Brock, you been behind my back renting out three of your five rooms. This is against the law."

"You don't mean it," Brock said.

Mr. Finger began ticking off invisible subtenants. "Mrs. Wodjeska, no husband, two kids, cleans offices at night—some subtenant! A no-good that calls himself Smith. Smith, ha! A G.I. and his wife name of Graham, just back from the service. Brock, those six didn't sign no lease with Harvey Finger."

"Let's talk this over," Brock said, showing his gold-capped teeth.

"So we're talking, ain't we?" the landlord said. "Twenty-five dollars a week per room you're charging. That's a monthly income to you of around three twenty-five. My super you smear forty a month. Me you pay the frozen rent of eighty-five. I didn't even graduate public school, Mr. Brock, but even I can figure your net profit on my apartment is two hundred bucks a month. So tell me one reason why I shouldn't report you to the State Temporary Rent Commission?"

"Aw, get smart," Brock said. "So I'm dispossessed. So they let you sign on a new tenant at a great big twelve dollars and seventy-five cents more a month, and you'll maybe have to redecorate, fix the plumbing, check the wiring, and God knows. Mr. Finger, what's the percentage?"

Mr. Finger said softly, "Fifty-fifty."

Brock got him, all right. "Robber!"

"Can names hurt me?" The landlord shrugged. "It's one hundred a month extra from you, or you're out on your ear."

"Fifty. Not a nickel more!"

"Hundred."

"Seventy-five—"

"I'm a one-price landlord," Mr. Finger said, not without humor. "Is it pay, Mr. Brock, or on your way, Mr. Brock?"

Brock kicked the armchair. It was his own chair, so Mr. Finger waited unperturbed.

"The goats ain't been running for me," Brock growled. "I got to have time to scrape it up."

"Scrape fast," Mr. Finger said, smiling. He turned at the door. "You got till eight o'clock tomorrow night."

"Big deal," Brock said bitterly.

He waited till the fat little man was gone and then he stalked up the hall and shoved Mrs. Wodjeska's door open. Mrs. Wodjeska

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was in bed being fed some soup by a little girl while another little girl applied cold compresses to her mother's head. When the two little girls saw who it was they stopped what they were doing and ran to hide behind the lopsided sofa.

"Can't you ever knock?" the woman said hoarsely.

Brock scowled. "You still sick?"

"It's the virus." Mrs. Wodjeska pulled the covers up to her chin. "What do you want?"

"My rent."

"I'll pay you next week."

"Listen, you, I been kidded by experts. What's the score?"

"Tomorrow I'm promised a job. Will you please go? You're scaring my children."

"Now I scare kids!" Brock said in an injured tone. "Look, Mrs. Social Register, I need this rent, see? You pay up by tomorrow night or bed your kids down on the sidewalk. This ain't the Salvation Army!"

Brock was figuring other angles when Hank Graham, the lanky ex-G.I., burst in on him.

"Okay, Brock," Graham said, glaring. "Where is it?"

Graham was twenty pounds lighter than Brock, but something in the thrust of his jaw made Brock step behind the armchair.

"Where is what?" Brock asked cautiously.

"My money!" Hank Graham said. "And don't play dumb with me, buddy. I want the three thousand dollars you swiped from my room, and I want it now."

"Hold it, hold it," Brock murmured. "You got three grand?"

"Savings. I brought it back from Germany last month and got married on the strength of it. Nobody knew about that money, Brock, not even my wife. I was keeping it for a down payment on a house in Jersey as a surprise to Juney. All of a sudden it's gone from where I hid it in my room, and you're the only one with a duplicate key to the lock!"

"First I hear of it," Brock said absently.

Young Graham advanced on the chair. "Give, you crook, or I call the police."

"Keep your shirt on, General. I didn't take your three grand. But I got a pretty good idea who did."

"And who would that be?"

"My experience is you check first and make with the names later," Brock said. "Look, Graham, yell copper and you may never see a cent. But give me time and I think I can get it back for you."

Hank Graham looked him over.

"Tomorrow night," he said grimly. "Then it's either my money back or you'll explain in a police station."

Through a crack in his door Brock watched the ex-G.I. trudge back to his room. Pretty June Graham was waiting in their doorway. She was in a clinging negligee and Brock automatically inven-

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toried her curves. He saw her ask her husband something in a puzzled way, and Graham's forced smile; then they went into their room and locked the door.

Brock waited.

He stole up the hall and scratched on the last door.

"Open up, Smith," he said in a soft voice. "It's Brock."

He grinned when he heard the chain rattle. Installing a chain latch had been Smith's own idea.

Smith glanced swiftly down the hall before he motioned Brock into his room and relatched the door. Smith was a dark skinny man with holes for eyes.

"What do *you* want?" He had a nasty voice.

"Graham's three thousand bucks."

"What, what?" Smith said excitedly.

Brock reached down to fix Smith's egg-stained tie. "I know I didn't take it, and it wasn't the Wodjeska number—what crook scrubs floors for a living? So that leaves you, Smitty. No three-buck lock would keep *you* out of the Grahams' room."

"You're on the junk," Smith jeered, trying to back off. "I don't know nothing about no three grand—"

Brock pulled Smith's tie tight, using both hands. Smith's eyes bugged and he began to turn blue, his legs jerking.

"You little punk," Brock smiled, "how long do you think it took me to spot you?—a guy who don't stick his nose out from one day to another except for a couple minutes at night sometimes. You're Ratsy Johnson, Frank Pompo's finger man. Inspector Queen's been looking for you since early summer to testify in the case he got up against Pompo for the D.A., and so's Pompo to see that you don't. Do you shell out Graham's three grand or do I tip off Queen *and* Pompo where you're hiding out?"

Johnson pointed frantically to his throat. Brock loosened his hold a little.

"I'll make a deal," the fugitive gasped.

"With what?"

"With a frame, that's with what! Brock, without moola I'll chance the D.A. I'm down to shoe buttons. You hog this bundle and I'll surrender to the law and say you fixed it for me to hide out in your place! See?"

Brock thought. Then he let go.

"Okay, I'll chisel the kid into settling for one grand of his dough, and I'll give you five C's for your end."

Ratsy Johnson fingered his neck. "We split even up, see?"

"You're a hard man," Brock mourned. "Where's the take?"

Johnson produced a cheap cigarette case. From it he extracted a stained king-size cigarette and peeled the paper down. The gap revealed a tuft of tobacco on one

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end, a filter at the other, and a green paper tube between. He unrolled the tube and it became three one-thousand-dollar bills. Brock snatched them, then looked down at his fingers. The oily stain on the cigarette paper was also on the outer bill.

"What do you smoke, fuel oil?" Brock wrapped the bills in a silk handkerchief and tucked it all carefully away.

Johnson clawed at him. "Give me mine, you chiseler!"

Brock's big hand chopped down and Johnson fell like a clubbed fish. "What's the uproar, Ratsy? You get yours when I con Graham into the deal. Maybe he won't play."

"Okay, okay," the fugitive snivveled from the floor. "But you double-cross me, Brock, and so help me—"

Brock went out grinning.

That was a Tuesday night.

On Wednesday one of Sergeant Velie's regular stoolies had passed the word that Ratsy Johnson was holed up in Apartment 4-A of a tenement on the West Side. Velie had had the house staked out since Wednesday afternoon, waiting for Johnson to show. He was not known to be armed but he was considered dangerous and the street seemed a safer place to take him. Detectives were planted on the roof, the fourth floor, and in the lobby. Because of the importance of the arrest Inspector Queen showed up to take personal charge, and Ellery tagged along.

At 8:30 P.M. the Inspector decided not to wait any longer and they had entered Apartment 4-A to find not only Ratsy Johnson but the body of Charlie the Chiseler Brock. Brock had been shot with a .45 automatic at close quarters—through one of his pillows used by his killer to muffle the report. His body was still warm.

In the first few minutes they learned all about Brock's illegal subrentals of three of his five rooms and the events of the night before. Brock's threat to put Mrs. Wodjeska and her children on the street for nonpayment of rent came out in a rush. The theft of Hank Graham's three thousand dollars had been registered by the aggrieved ex-G.I. immediately. Even landlord Finger's ultimatum to Brock twenty-four hours earlier was in Sergeant Velie's notebook, Mr. Finger deciding that candor about a harmless little rent conspiracy was preferable to being mixed up in a murder.

And Ratsy Johnson, found cowering in his room, meekly undid the chain with his own hands and apparently was so overwhelmed by his plight—caught by the police, hunted by boss mobster Frank Pompo, and now up to his stringy neck in a murder rap—that he confessed his theft of young Graham's money and told all about his Tuesday night deal with Brock.

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It was all very clear—except who was lying about what went on in Charlie the Chiseler Brock's dirty bedroom between 8:00 and 8:30 Wednesday evening.

Landlord Harvey Finger had arrived at the apartment house for his payoff from Brock a few minutes before 8:00 P.M. He had been permitted to enter 4-A, but on coming out a few minutes later he was stopped by detectives; and after Brock's corpse was found at 8:30, when they entered the apartment to arrest Johnson, the little fat landlord insisted he had left Brock alive.

Hank Graham said he had visited Brock's room after Finger's departure, spoken to Brock for five minutes or so, and claimed he too had left Brock alive.

Ratsy Johnson said he had not seen Brock on Wednesday evening at all, and Mrs. Wodjeska said the same thing. The hoodlum had no alibi, and Mrs. Wodjeska's two little girls could not corroborate their mother's claim, as they had been playing hopscotch all evening in the alley behind the tenement with other children.

So it all came back to the pretty blonde girl found standing over the body, the gun in her hand.

She had been revived by Ellery and her frantic husband and now she was in one of Brock's chairs, pale and trembling.

"Why did you kill this man?" Inspector Queen said to her.

"She didn't kill him," Hank Graham shouted, "and for God's sake cover him up."

Sergeant Velie obliged with the evening paper.

"I didn't kill him," Juney Graham said, not looking. "I came in here to talk to him and this is what I found."

"And the gun?" Ellery asked gently.

"It was on the floor and I picked it up."

"Why?"

She did not reply.

"Innocent people who walk in on corpses and immediately pick up the gun are common in the movies and television," Ellery said, "but in real life they'd rather pick up a live rattlesnake. Why did you pick up the gun, Mrs. Graham?"

The girl's hands twisted. "I—I don't know. I wasn't thinking, I guess."

"Did you ever see the gun before?" Inspector Queen asked.

"No."

It went on that way for some time.

"Now as I get it," Inspector Queen said to Hank Graham's pretty bride, "your husband went to Brock's room to demand the return of his three thousand dollars that Brock had promised to get back. Brock offered him a thousand dollars in settlement, your husband lost his temper and refused, and he came rushing back to your room all set to call the police. And

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that was when he told you he'd saved three thousand dollars of his overseas pay and it had been stolen from him, Mrs. Graham? That's the first you knew about the whole thing?"

June Graham nodded stiffly.

"Why did you talk your husband out of calling the police?"

"I was afraid Hank would get beaten up or—or something. I never did want to rent this room. I didn't like Brock's looks."

Sergeant Velie had been studying the girl's curves. "Brock ever make a pass at you?"

"No! I mean—well, once, when Hank was out. I slapped his face and he walked out laughing. But he never tried it again."

"You didn't tell me that," Hank Graham said slowly.

Inspector Queen and his son exchanged glances.

"Now about that gun, Mrs. Graham," Ellery began.

"I've told you about the gun!"

"You talked your husband out of phoning the police and you went to Brock's room to see what you could do," the Inspector said. "Take it from there."

"But I've told you!"

"Tell us again."

"I knocked," June Graham said wearily. "He didn't answer. I tried the door. It opened. I went in. He was lying on the floor all . . . all messy. There was a gun beside the body. I picked it up and then you all came in."

"Why did you pick up the gun, Mrs. Graham?"

"I don't *know*, I tell you."

"Then suppose I tell you," Ellery said. "You picked it up because you recognized it."

"No!" It was almost a scream.

"Instead of bulldozing the poor kid," Hank Graham muttered, "why don't you find my three thousand dollars?"

"Oh, we found them, Graham. We found them right here in Brock's room, stashed under the arch support of an alligator shoe. The shoe, by the way, was on Brock's foot." Inspector Queen smiled. "But let's not change the subject, Graham. Your wife is lying about that gun."

"I'm not!" the girl said despairingly. "I never saw it before."

"Good try, Mrs. Graham," Ellery said, "but not good enough. The fact is it's your husband's gun—an Army .45. When you found it beside Brock's body after Hank had been arguing with him, you naturally thought Hank had shot him. Isn't that it?"

"Hank, no! Don't!"

"No use, honey." Hank Graham shook his head. "Okay, Mr. Queen, it's my gun. But I didn't shoot Brock. I left him alive."

"That's your story," Inspector Queen said sadly, for he was a notorious softie about young love. But he signaled Sergeant Velie.

"Hank!" The girl flew to him and clung, sobbing.

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"A story with one chapter missing," Ellery said, eying June Graham tenderly. "You left something out, Graham."

Hank Graham was stroking his wife's hair. He did not bother to look up. "Did I?"

"Yes. The one fact that clears you, you idiot, and pins this murder where it belongs!"

And Ellery had them bring Brock's killer in.

"You kept saying your money was stolen from where you'd hidden it in your room, Graham, and Johnson admitted he'd been the thief. But what you forgot to tell us, and what Johnson carefully neglected to say, was where in your room the money was hidden."

He requisitioned the official envelope containing the evidence and from it he took Graham's money.

"These three one-thousand-dollar bills were tightly rolled up, and the top bill is oil-stained," Ellery said. "You'd therefore hidden your money, Graham, in something narrow and tube-like whose insides are oily. Hank, why didn't you tell us you'd rolled up the bills *and slipped them into the barrel of your .45 for safekeeping?*"

"Holy smokes," Hank groaned.

"Then it wasn't money Ratsy Johnson was after when he went on the prowl in your room, it was your .45. He had no gun and he figured a newly returned G.I. might have one. It was only when he examined the .45 later that he found the three bills in the barrel.

"So the money places the gun that shot Brock in your possession, Ratsy," Ellery said to the suddenly green-faced fugitive. "You sneaked into Brock's room after Graham left tonight, shot Brock, looked for the money he'd hijacked from you, couldn't find it, lost your nerve, and ducked back to your room. Juney Graham must have just missed seeing you as she went to Brock's room to find him dead." Ellery turned and grinned at the newlyweds. "Any questions?"

"Yes," Hank Graham said, drying his wife's tears. "Anybody know a good real estate agent?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

TITLE: ***Circle of Guilt***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: Now

COMMENTS: *An exposé of one of the most terrifying problems in our life and times, told realistically but compassionately, by a man who is undoubtedly a born writer.*

SEVERAL YEARS AGO A CONFERENCE took place in a large West Coast city. The subject of discussion was a planned reorganization of the sale and distribution of a nationally known product in one of the counties near that city. It was proposed that all minor agencies be closed out and that one franchise be issued for the entire county. The asking price was $5,000,000.

At the moment the preliminary conference of sale got under way, Sandy Sanders's mother was attending a meeting of the Business and Professional Women's Club, and Sandy was rifling her shopping purse which she had left behind.

Ed Nestor was piloting a plane across the International Date Line.

C. C. Coleman, in his dusty little wholesaler drugs-and-sundries place, was busying himself with a can of sugar of milk and a jar of quinine. He was also humming to himself.

Robert Nestor, Edward's father, was sitting in his favorite chair reading Addison's *Cato:* "But thou, O Soul, shalt flourish in eternal Life, Amidst the Crash of Matter and the Wrack of Worlds."

Burgoo Jackson was trying out several keys on the door of an automobile that did not belong to him; finally he found one that fit.

Sam Coffee was calling up his supplier, Slim Jim.

Sheriff's Captain Caesar Augustus Smith was saying to a lost little boy, "I *know* your daddy's name is 'Daddy.' But what does your Mommy call him?"

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And Dr. Jasper Seagram was assuring a patient in the County Hospital that Science was making Wonderful Strides. The patient was as good as dead and Dr. Seagram knew it very well, even if the patient didn't.

None of them was aware of the sale conference.

"Five million is a very reasonable figure," someone said, tapping with his pencil on the little pad of paper in front of him. "Considering the way the population of the county is increasing. And certainly, if you run a unilateral operation, as you say you intend to, the initial investment will be recovered in no time at all."

Two of the men nodded. The fourth one shrugged. "It won't be that smooth," he demurred. "There will have to be a lot of replacements."

The talk flowed on.

Mr. Nestor put down his copy of *Cato*. He frowned a bit, in a puzzled way, rubbed his face with his fingers, then got up. He looked at the mantelpiece and smiled. Pictures of his son marched across it from one end to the other: Eddie in his first baseball suit, Eddie in cadet uniform, Eddie as a brand-new Ensign, Eddie as a Transpacific Airlines captain. The smile deepened, then faded.

"I don't believe I feel very well," Robert Nestor said.

The sale had been consummated and they all shook hands. The sellers left. The purchaser looked at his general managers. "That's the new picture, then," he said. "No more free-lance buying or selling. Everyone goes on straight salary and commission."

"Some of them may not make as much—"

"Only at the very first," corrected the new owner. "The instant sales pick up, it will be felt in every echelon. And the key to increased sales is to increase Consumer Demand. Now, this map of the county . . ."

When he finally realized that his father was going to be all right, Ed Nestor gave silent thanks for that particular blessing. The news of his father's operation had spread all around the field. Even the Customs men, who knew him well enough, of course, and passed him quickly through as a rule because he'd never tried to pull anything—this time they just waved him by and said they hoped his father would be all right.

And, of course, he was.

"We were just a lit-tle bit worried about the clotting time at first," Dr. Seagram had said. "But as it turned out, we didn't need to worry at all. He'll be as well as he ever was. And *that*, I may say, is pret-ty well. For a man his age—" The physician seemed to be as proud of Robert Nestor as if he

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had made him in his laboratory. "No, I'll put it this way: by the calendar your father is 75 years old. But his body is that of a man of 65—a well-preserved 65 at that. His spirit—"

Ed nodded. He was relieved, he was excited, he was worried, he was confident. Everything had happened at once. Meeting Von Schahl and hearing from him what he didn't believe—how did he *know?* How long had they been watching him?—And now, while Dr. Seagram spoke about blood pressure and convalescence, Ed Nestor's eyes noticed little things—that doctors' diplomas didn't wrinkle the way they used to, that the receptionist looked prettier with her glasses on than off—just the opposite from the movies or TV. He waited for the question of fees and costs to be raised, but the question didn't worry him one tiny little bit—not now.

Ed was not only very fond of his father, he respected and admired him, and as a result was very much influenced by him. Jake South used to kid him about it.

"There's an awful lot of mama's boys around," Jake had said. "But you're a papa's boy, Ed, and that's not only a very different thing, it's a hell of a lot rarer."

They were resting in one of the suites the airline kept for its male flight personnel. The women were at another hotel. The suite was furnished partly Western and partly Eastern—an idea copied from a fairly common Japanese practice—so that if you felt like sinking into an overstuffed armchair, you could do that, and if you wanted the springy feel of matting under your feet, you could have that, too.

"What I mean," Jake had gone on, "you mention your dad so often, and yet I know you've got a mind of your own and you use it. But do you ever do anything you feel your father could never, under any circumstances, approve of?"

They were watching on television the Japanese equivalent of old cowboy pictures: horses thundered, sabers swished, samurai lunged and leaped, *ronin* avenged old wrongs on wicked lords. The sound was down low, as neither man understood more than a smattering of pidgin-Nihongo.

Ed Nestor said, "I don't need to search my soul to answer. No, I never have—so far." Jake raised his eyebrows—they were black and smooth, and Jake always said he was obliged to depend on *their* impressing women because nature had carelessly denied him other outstanding attributes. Ed explained that he felt he couldn't go against his father's code for any light or trivial cause.

"For example," Jake proposed, "if it's a married woman it's got

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to be the Queen of France—or nobody? Right?"

Ed grinned. "Making allowances for your monorail mind, yes."

And so far—*so far*—he hadn't met the Queen of France.

Von Schahl had not looked like the Queen of France. His hair was white, his eyes were gray, his face was a mass of intricate lines which might have been drawn with ruler and compass.

He had stopped by Ed's table in a smoky night club called, for some reason inexplicable except perhaps to the Oriental mind, The Spring Garden. "I believe I've seen you before," he said. "Aren't you one of the Transpacific pilots?" The gutturals of his native language lay beneath the British accent he had learned on the Continent—like rocks beneath the surface of the water which every now and then were plainly exposed. "Used to do some flying myself, many years ago. In what was once called 'The Great War.' Matter of fact—" he rubbed his left arm and there was a faint displacement of the lines around the corners of his mouth. "—I still have a souvenir right here from your chaps, and I still feel it, mind you, in damp weather. May I sit down?"

Before Ed could answer, or even hesitate, Von Schahl said, "If you don't mind having a drink with an ex-enemy." Ed hastened to disclaim any such objection and pulled out the chair. Under the spotlight a girl, dressed in a holster and not very much else but who would have looked far more at home with a kimono and a baby, sang *Pistol Packin' Mama*. Von Schahl sat down with a faint sigh, pulling up his knife-edged trousers.

They had a drink. They had another drink.

Von Schahl explained that he had been a construction engineer in Japan for thirty years. "I have a small pension—it doesn't go very far," he said. Ed waited for the touch. He hadn't exactly expected it, but—

"Pensions never rise with the cost of living," Von Schahl went on. "I imagine you've noticed that, even in America. A schoolteacher's pension—"

"It's funny that you should mention that. My father . . ." Ed's voice came to a slow halt. He looked at the old man with whom he was drinking.

Von Schahl cleared his throat. The wing-collar around it moved a trifle. "Funny? Oh, you mean 'odd'. That I know your father is a retired schoolteacher? No, not odd at all. However, in my own case, I supplement my ridiculously tiny pension by other work. Personnel, that's my field. Well, and a little export, too. Now, I have a proposal to make to you. You can supplement your own income—or your savings—$3300, is it not? A

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rather small sum, but of course you help your father, and you are a young man, you like to have fun, here and in the States—very natural, very natural indeed. And somehow there isn't much left to save, is there? This work I have in mind will not interfere with your present work. In fact, it can be done at the same time."

The spotlight now played on a little man doing magic tricks. Ed realized that there would be no touch. "A friend of mine once had a similar proposition put to him," he said. "I think it was diamonds. Or pearls. He was offered a thousand dollars."

Once again the lines around Von Schahl's mouth moved. He waved his hand. "Chicken feed," he said. "I believe that is the right phrase—'chicken feed'? Yes? This is a more lucrative proposal, and you can do it as often as you like. Or you can do it just once."

"Diamonds?" Ed asked. "Or pearls?"

Von Schahl shrugged. He said that it didn't really matter. Ed said that he supposed not. He asked Von Schahl to name a figure. Von Schahl did so. Immediately Ed doubled it. Von Schahl leaned back and looked at him. He shook his head. Nestor shrugged.

"Very well," Von Schahl said, after a moment. "But you will have to take more. I cannot guarantee that in the future—"

"There won't be any future," Ed said, firmly. "This is a one-shot operation. As soon as I collect my dowry I'm going to be virtuous again."

Von Schahl remarked that it was very well put.

And so here Ed sat in Dr. Seagram's office. The wads of hundred-dollar bills were distributed throughout his pockets. First thing tomorrow he must visit the safe-deposit box where his late mother's few pieces of jewelry were kept. The polyethylene-wrapped package was, of course, no longer with him. The short, stocky man had got in the car just where Von Schahl said he would, had picked up the package, paid for it, and got out a short while later.

That was that. Ed had met the Queen of France and had succumbed. He had done what he knew his father would never approve of. He did not intend ever to do it again, but he had no regrets at all for this one time.

"He should be out of bed in a week," said Dr. Seagram, "and as good as new."

The dirty window contained a display of bathing caps, bobby pins on cards, boxes of absorbent cotton, fly-specked advertising placards. It hadn't been changed for years.

Miss Ethel Coleman stopped by the door and shifted her bag of groceries. She reached to the bell and pressed it a few times. Then

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again, impatiently. After a minute her brother stuck his head out of the door in the rear of the place and through the unwashed plate glass she could see him skittering toward her. Miss Coleman clicked her tongue and scowled.

"Well, Ethel!" he chattered, letting her in. "Weh-hel, weh-hel! Got a kiss for your baby brother Chuck? Hmm?" She offered him her leathery cheek as he danced around her, then went on to the back of the store. It was hardly less cluttered than the front. His sister glared at the mess. She let her bag of groceries thud to the table, took out a large paper sack of coffee, and smacked it down as if she were teaching it a lesson.

Mr. C. C. Coleman guffawed. "Weh-hel! Weh-hel! Business is booming! *Not for just an hour, not for just a day,*" he sang, loudly and badly off-key, "*but aw-hall-ways!*"

"Oh, for pity's sake, shut up!" his sister snapped. "Let me have it and get out of here. It *is* ready, isn't it?"

The scanty colorless eyebrows of her baby brother Chuck went way up. "Why, of *course* it's ready! I don't mind work! I dote on labor! The more the merrier!" He took the sack of coffee and replaced it with another. "Ah, there's nothing like omitting the middleman," he chuckled, as Ethel put the second sack in her shopping bag. "Expand! Flourish! That's the way to do business! Say, what've Bert and Percy done since they were bought out, do you know, Ethel?"

"No," Miss Coleman said, shortly.

"I felt just kinda little bit bad about Nick, though." He shook his head dolefully.

Ethel said, "Served him right."

Nick had been in business for a long time, Mr. Coleman remembered. At his age it was hard to change. "I didn't go to the funeral, though." He shook his head again. "Uh-uh. I remember him—*here*—in my heart." He thumped his flabby chest. His eyes met hers, then fell. She sucked in her lower lip, looked at him, waited. After a moment he said, plaintively, "Say, um, Ethel—"

"Well?"

Her brother's voice became plaintive, almost silky. "I thought it was understood that *I* was to do all the pharmaceutical work. I mean, so what if I'm not a licensed pharmacist? Haven't I been in the business long enough? How come Sam Coffee's doing his own pharmaceutical work, still?"

His sister frowned. "What do you mean, 'still?'" she demanded.

Mr. Coleman's finger doddled in the white film of dust at one end of the table. Absently, he licked it. "Well . . . Sam Coffee was in here yesterday, and he wanted some of *that*—" He pointed to a container bearing the label of a large commercial laboratory.

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Ethel's breath hissed. "He had some nerve! You didn't give it to him?"

Mr. Coleman giggled. "Well, I didn't want any *trouble*—" he said, nervously.

"You won't have. I'll see that *he's* taken care of. Of *all* the nerve —*Well*? Will you finish what you have to say and let me get *out* of here? I've got *work* to do."

Her brother said he was just wondering. "When are we going to scale it down from 5%. They said—"

"When you're *told* to! Satisfied?"

He nodded, smiled, chuckled. "It's like the story about the Chinese fellow." He looked at her hopefully.

His sister's mouth tightened. "Jokes." It might have been a dirty word. After a moment she said, "well, drop the other shoe."

Mr. Coleman said that this here Chinese fellow was over in the United States. Laughter, in anticipation, bubbled out in a little lather at the corners of his wide, loose mouth. His sister watched distastefully. "—and when he was ready to *leave* they, um, asked him, 'Well, what do you think of things over here, huh?' So he, um, says, 'Amelican people velly funny. They boil tea to make it hot, then they put in ice to make it cold. They put lemon in to make it sour, then they add sugar to make it sweet. They say, 'Here's to you'— and they dlink it themselves!" He whooped, slapped his sides. "Get the comparison?" he wheezed.

His sister picked up her grocery bag. She stooped, tugged at her girdle. "You talk too much," she said. "Better not let *me* catch you drinking it yourself." ("Oh, *never*, Ethel!" He was shocked.) "'Bye," she added grudgingly, and left.

Mr. Coleman smiled and chuckled again. He picked up the can of milk sugar and the brown, wide-mouthed bottle of quinine sulfate. "Two operations at a time, where there used to be only one. Progress, progress!" he marveled. Grunting, he put the containers back.

Mrs. Sanders was out at a meeting of her garden club when the phone rang. Sandy answered. It was Burgoo. "Any bread, Fred?" he asked. Sandy snickered.

"Couldn't you score?" he asked.

"Man, I can't find my connection. Old Sam just *ain't*."

Sandy whistled. "Hey, that's bad. Is there a bug on?"

Burgoo said he didn't know. "I don't *think* it's a panic," he said. "But there's *some* kind of a flip the past few weeks. Haven't you noticed?"

Sandy started to answer, but Burgoo broke in. His voice was uneven. "Man, I'm *sick*," he said. "Let me score, huh, man? I'd do the same for you."

"I'll get in the wheels and be right over," Sandy said. He heard Burgoo's breath break in relief.

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Sam Coffee had two pads, one downtown, one on the west side. He and Slim Jim were sitting in the west side one. Fast music, rhythm and blues, burbled from the radio. "I hear you was busted," Slim Jim said, casually.

Sam Coffee looked at the stocky figure, gave a short laugh. "Ah, what a bum rap," he said. "You shoulda seen their faces when the lab dick come in and he says, 'It's lactose,' he says. Lactose, that's milk sugar. Them dumb cops."

Slim Jim sighed. "How dumb you think they are? You think them screws they got no idea what milk sugar is for?"

Sam Coffee was a picture of outraged innocence. "So maybe I'm using it for the baby's formula! It's a free country! You don't need no permit for milk sugar."

Slim Jim shook his head. "*What* baby? And you with your rep. The screws are probably in your other pad right now, tearing the place apart and taking the pieces down to the lab. And what about your pushers? How can they score when their connection ain't around?" Sam Coffee moved his legs, fidgeted, but his smile stayed smug. "And another thing—what business *you* got with milk sugar?" Slim Jim demanded. "Ethel's dopey brother takes care of that. You been *told*."

Sam Coffee said, "Maybe I like my merchandise to go farther."

Slim Jim made a face. "You're hard to convince. You ain't no independent businessman no more. You're an employee. Nick couldn't learn. And now you—" With a swift, sudden movement he seized Sam Coffee by the left arm, ripped his sleeve open. Sam Coffee jerked convulsively as Slim Jim looked at the arm, but he could not free himself.

Sweat broke out on Sam Coffee's face. "I was just joy-popping," he exclaimed.

Slim Jim shook his head. "You joy-pop today, tomorrow you're hooked. And you're too high up in the business to be hooked. A junkie ain't safe. In fact, you ain't safe *now*. You made too many wrong moves already. That why you cut the stuff," he said to the squirming, frightened man, "to make up for what you jolt yourself?"

He let him go, then planted his knee in his stomach. As Sam Coffee bent over in agony, Slim Jim rabbit-punched him, then gave him a side blow to the temple. Sam Coffee lay on the floor, twitching, his eyes turned up. Slim Jim sat on him, took off Sam's necktie, wound it tightly around Sam's throat. Then he dragged him into the next room. He opened the closet, clicked his tongue at its overstuffed condition, then rolled the now still figure under the bed.

Slim Jim was a short, heavy fellow, and his exertions had made him pant and grunt. He went in

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the living room and sat down for a few minutes. After a few minutes he left.

Sandy took off his hat carefully. He asked what they were going to do if Sam Coffee didn't show up. "I still say, maybe it's the heat. Maybe the screws got him."

Burgoo seemed indifferent to Sam Coffee's whereabouts. "Yeah, maybe he's busted," he agreed. "But they'll put another connection on. *He'll* get in touch with me . . . Where's the bread, man, where's the junk?"

His friend reached into the sweatband of his hat, took out a folded piece of paper. Burgoo smiled. Sandy slapped his pockets, frowned. Burgoo said, "What, forget your works? Use mine. Be my guest . . . boy, I'm *sick*. I need it bad." His fingers quivered as he lifted the cushion from a battered easy chair, groped inside the torn upholstery, and came out with a small, flat tin box. Both young men sighed. Burgoo opened it. Inside was a small spoon with black undersurface, a hypodermic needle, a piece of absorbent cotton, and a small piece of twisted newsprint. He lit a candle in a bottle on the table, drew some water from the tap into the spoon, and reached for the folded piece of paper that had come from Sandy's hat.

Sandy's hand prevented his. "The score, man," Sandy said. "Where's the gold?"

Burgoo hesitated. He began to plead. "Hey, man, I've let you jolt for free."

"Sure you did." Sandy was still smiling. "When I was still on tea. You said that tea was kids' stuff. You let me jolt without scoring. Until I was hooked. But not since."

Burgoo continued to plead. His connection had refused to supply him, he said, unless he brought in new customers. Then he broke off abruptly, took several bills from his pocket, and handed them to Sandy.

Sandy shook part of the contents of the folded paper into the spoon. Burgoo held it over the flame. They watched intently, with awe and anticipation.

After a while Sandy said, dreamily, "Man, I'm one happy head."

Burgoo slumped in his chair. "I still feel sick," he said. "I need another fix. I got to find a connection. And I got to get some gold."

As soon as Ed Nestor had turned in his flight reports he went and asked if there were any messages for him. The girl said slowly, "Well . . . yes . . . Gee, I'm sorry. Here it is. For you to get in touch with the County Hospital at once. Your father is there."

Ed frowned, then laughed. "That's an *old* message, Grace. My father's been out of the hospital for—"

Grace shook her head. "I'm

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sorry, Captain Nestor, but it just came in a few minutes ago. You can see for yourself."

Sheriff's Captain C. A. Smith leaned over. "What did he look like?" he asked. Mr. Nestor slowly turned his head. His expression was faint but unmistakable: it read, I-beg-your-pardon-sir-but-I-didn't-hear-you. "What did he look like—the fellow you caught trying to bust into your car—the one who attacked you. Could you please give us some idea of what he looked like?"

The old man nodded. He had received a civil request. It did not greatly interest him, but it behooved a gentleman to answer. He nodded. He considered his thoughts a moment. "Yellow eyes," he said at last. "Boy had yellow eyes."

Mrs. Sanders was home for once. She *had* planned to spend the afternoon at the beach, but it had turned dark and threatened rain. So she stayed home and read a book about how to look younger and live longer by consuming large amounts of brewer's yeast, blackstrap molasses, and yogurt. After a while she noticed her son. He sat slouched in a chair. He had been sitting there for some time. All at once she felt a rush of maternal concern. It wasn't easy, being a young widow, and trying to keep from stagnating. She did her best to keep up her interest in things—to stay active, to meet people. And children nowadays—though her son was really a young man—were capable enough of looking after themselves. It was too bad that he hadn't wanted to go to college—that would have occupied him, at least until the Army called for him. She looked at him, then asked a question she hadn't asked in a long time. "Don't you feel well, Roger?"

Sandy felt terrible. He'd felt terrible all afternoon. He'd had a fix—in fact, he'd had two—but he still felt terrible. It must be the stuff he'd been given. He'd tasted it, after the second jolt, because he knew (some hypes didn't know, but by this time *he* knew) that the stuff was cut. He wanted to find out how much it had been cut—if it had been cut more than usual. Maybe that was why he still felt "sick," because it was too weak to be any good. Milk sugar was what they put in to cut it; but he'd tasted it and it tasted real bitter, the way H should. It tasted like the stuff his father had made him take once, years ago, that time they'd gone to Mexico. What was it? Quinine: it had tasted as bitter as—

"Don't you feel well, Roger?" his mother asked again.

He turned toward her listlessly and muttered, "Huh?"

She put her hand to her mouth. "Roger! Your eyes! They're all

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yellow! It couldn't be malaria," she said, coming and sitting on the arm of the chair; "not *here*. It must be jaundice. I'll take you to the doctor. Can you walk to the car?"

She got up. Her son shook his head. There was a funny feeling in his side, just below the right ribs. "I don't need the doctor—"

"Either you go to him or he comes to you, because—" She stopped. Her forehead wrinkled. "Roger, that friend of yours with the funny name? Burgoo? Not that I care much for his being your friend. I don't like to say anything, Roger, but I've missed money at times after he's been here to see you—Well, what I *started* to say: I passed him downtown this morning and I just got a *glimpse* of him—he turned his face away—but it struck me then that *his* eyes were yellow. Maybe you caught it from him. Did you use his dishes or anything like that?"

Despite his feeling so bad and his anxiety to keep her from calling the doctor, he had to smile. "Maybe it was some of his cutlery," he said. He got up and went toward her, trying to think of an acceptable excuse. "It's just a hangover," he lied. He hated the stuff, no "head" could tolerate it. "I don't need the doctor. I'm just not up to drinking," he said.

Suddenly, he went cold, cold, cold, and it got very dark and very loud and his mother caught him in her arms as he fell . . .

Later, at the hospital, Mrs. Sanders said, "*Of course* he was with me all afternoon. In fact, you can check with my friend Lucy Dawson. I spoke to her just a little bit after one o'clock, and she said, 'I hope you won't be lonely there all by yourself' and *I* said, 'Oh, no. My son Roger is here with me.' So I just don't see what the *police* have to do with this. After all, jaundice, or hepatitis, or whatever you call it, isn't a *social* disease."

Doing his awkward best to be tactful, Captain Smith said, "No, no, of course it isn't, but we don't like to see an epidemic start. So maybe while you and the doctor here are discussing your boy's case, maybe if you'll excuse us, he and I can just, uh . . ." He floundered on until Dr. Seagram drew her away.

Captain Smith and Sandy looked at each other. "You weren't over at Cottonwood Place early this afternoon?" Smith asked. Sandy shook his head. Smith nodded. "You know this Burgoyne Jackson —Burgoo, he's called—you know him long? The one your mother thinks you caught this yellow jaundice from his cutlery?"

Sandy was ill and confused. Ever since he had been a hype he had considered every ache or pain or other symptom only in the light of his addiction: if he didn't feel

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well it merely meant he needed a fix. If he had the fix and still felt bad, it was because the stuff must have been cut. But now— He considered the question, swallowed. His mouth tasted rotten. "I was . . . I was just joking about the cutlery."

Smith nodded again. He moved up to the head of the bed. Two yellow eyes followed him. "Let me see your arms," he said, picking up one of the hands clutching the coverlet. When he started to lift the arm, it went stiff. "Listen, son," Smith said, gently. "I know this Burgoo boy. He's got a record. He's an addict, he's been jailed for 'Possession,' he's served time for breaking into cars, phone coin boxes, parking meters . . . Let go, now. I'm not going to hurt you, but I can pull harder than you can. Mmm. This one right here is where they took the blood sample downstairs. But not *this* one . . . How big is your habit?"

Sandy said nothing. He felt very weak. His body betrayed him in every nerve and cell.

The older man sighed. "You didn't know that you could get what you got now from using a needle that wasn't sterile, did you? Son, that's not all you can get. You ever see an old hype, a *real* old head, with his clothes off? It isn't pretty. They got sores and ulcers all over them."

Tremors of old fears, undispelled since childhood, stirred in Sandy, then flared up. "*Blood* poisoning?" he whispered, horrified. "I could lose my *arm?*"

"Where is this Burgoo? Until we find him, find out what *he's* got, we can't be sure what you've got."

Sandy's mouth trembled. "I don't know where he is." A spasm of nausea shook him. The funny, swollen feeling just below his right ribs (what *was* there? the liver?) turned into a pain, began to kick—kick—kick. "He needed money for junk. He said he was going out to knock over some wheels . . . I haven't seen him." He paused. "I feel awful," he whispered. "Could I see my mother, please?" He looked at the sheriff's officer and two runnels of tears poured from his yellow eyes.

"Well, gee, that's too bad, that's a terrible thing—what a shame," Captain Smith said. He looked blank, shook his head. "I wanted to bring this young junkie in, soon's we pick him up, which I guess we will soon—the alarm is out for him—and see if the old man could identify him." His eyes traveled round the small room, as if he were looking for something. The chafed walls, the chipped metal piping of the wheeled screen, the worn characterless furniture, the vessels and implements which go with illness and injury—nothing told him anything. He breathed the heavy air and his

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nose wrinkled at the stifling, medicated smell. Then he looked up quickly as Ed Nestor pushed aside the screen and got up from the chair by the bedside. The law officer took in the white face, the eyes and mouth set with pain. The pilot breathed in quick, noisy, shallow breaths. After a moment he gained more control over himself.

Not wishing to stare, Smith turned away, resuming his conversation with the County Medical Examiner and Dr. Seagram. "They'd been bringing it up from Mexico," he said. "But from what the Federal Narcotics Bureau tells me, the business in this locality is under new management. That fits in with a few things I've noticed myself. You have your eye on certain characters, then suddenly they ain't around. And then some of them turn up dead. *You* know who I mean," he addressed the Medical Examiner, who nodded. "Nick, for instance. Sam Coffee. Maybe they resisted new policies. Maybe—" He turned toward Edward Nestor. He said, awkwardly, that he was sorry he hadn't known his father better. "He was a very fine man, from all I heard about him."

Ed nodded. After a moment he said, "They don't make them any better. He was everything you could ask a father to be. If it wasn't for his bringing me up—" he struggled with his voice, then went on, "—*I* might be burning up the roads like crazy in a stolen car . . . It was a new car, you know, and he was so proud of it. I'd just bought it for him. I was going to do so much for him . . ."

Captain Smith said, "It sure is too bad. But we'll catch that fellow, don't *you* worry . . . Oh, let me clear up one point: I don't think this fellow broke into the car with the intention of stealing it. No, all he wanted was, he wanted to get something he could steal and sell so's he could buy heroin with it. I was just telling the Medical Examiner what I hear from the Federal men in the Narcotics Bureau —that this new syndicate isn't bringing the stuff in from Mexico any more. The word is that it's coming in from Japan. In one- or two-kilo packages. A kilo, that's two-point-two pounds. Used to wrap it up in cellophane, but now they bring it wrapped in polyethylene"—he had trouble with the word—"bags."

Smith put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Maybe you should have Doc Seagram give you a little something, huh? You look pretty rocky. Well, that's how it hits you. *I* know what it is to lose a father. But you got this comfort: you know that your father had the satisfaction of bringing up a son clean and decent and a credit to his memory."

The Sheriff's Captain turned to the others—they all nodded agreement.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

TITLE: ***Don't Bet on Murder***

TYPE: Suspense Thriller

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: Late 1930s

COMMENTS: *Fredericks claimed that every person is a potential murderer. Trainor said that normal people, no matter what the provocation, will not commit murder . . . What do you think?*

HE WAS A WISE GUY. HE'D HAD one drink too many, but even without that he still would have been a wise guy. He had too much money, that was the whole trouble with him. No, that wasn't it either; he had an offensive way of showing he had too much money. Get the difference? Always knew everything. That type. Ready to bet any amount on anything, at the drop of a hat. On whether the next pretty girl to come down the street would be a blonde or a brunette.

Money talks, they say. His always drowned out the other fellow's argument. He'd put up stakes he knew the other fellow couldn't afford, leaving him a choice of backing down or being taken for a thorough cleaning. His money had a habit of putting the other fellow in the wrong, either way: making a liar out of him or showing him up for a welsher. I'm convinced he would have caught cold without a fat overstuffed wallet for a chest-protector. He was always making round trips in and out of his pocket, with a flourish and a hard slap down and a challenging bellow. And the way he hounded them afterward until he'd collected what was coming to him, you'd think he really needed the money.

He was the one usually on the collecting end too, poetic justice to the contrary. He didn't have a real gambler's instincts. Apart from a

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few side bets of the type I've mentioned above, he almost always picked a sure thing. Not much of a sport, when it came right down to it. The dislike, the spark of animosity his overbearing ways always aroused, was what got his bets taken up for him more often than not. Case of the poor slobs cutting their noses to spite their faces, just because they hated his insides so.

He steered clear of professionals, seldom bet on sporting events. If I hadn't known he'd been born wealthy, I would have suspected him of making a nice living out of this nasty little pastime of his. But there wasn't even that excuse. Yet he put the screws on worse than a loan shark, using a man's reputation and self-respect among his friends as a bludgeon to make them pay through the nose.

There was a story around town, never substantiated, that he was indirectly to blame for one high-strung young chap putting an end to himself, to forestall discovery of a defalcation that had been the result of his topheavy "obligation" to this Fredericks. I wouldn't have put it past him.

I'm one of those lucky people that nothing ever happens to, that are always the bystanders. I was the bystander the night this happened at the 22 Club, too.

Fredericks had never tackled me. Maybe he sensed a detached amusement that baffled him. He could have waved that famous wallet in front of my nose till it wore out and it wouldn't have done him any good. He knew enough not to try it.

I came into the 22 Club with Trainor, and we saw Fredericks there swilling drinks. He came over to our table, and there was a minimum of conversation for a while. I wanted to walk out again, but he was between the two of us and I couldn't get Trainor's eye.

The radio over the bar was giving news events, and the highlight was the description of the capture of a long-wanted murderer, cornered at last after being hunted high and low for months. The case, which we all remembered well, was finally closed.

The commentator was good, played it up for all it was worth. It got you. You couldn't hear a sound in the place until he'd finished. Then we all took a deep breath together.

"There, but for the grace of God," Fredericks remarked drily, "go you or I or any one of us."

Trainor gave him a look. "Thanks for the compliment, but I don't class myself as a potential murderer. Nor does Evans here, I'm sure."

"Everyone is," Fredericks said loftily. "Every man you see standing around you in this bar is. It's the commonest impulse and we all have it. It's latent in all of us,

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every man-jack. All it's waiting for is a strong enough motive to come to the surface and—bang!" He drained his glass, started to warm up. "Why, I can pick any two men at random, outside on the street, who have nothing against each other, who've never even seen each other before; you give them a powerful enough motive, and one'll turn into a potential murderer, the other his potential victim, right before your eyes!"

He was feeling his drinks, I guess. He wasn't showing them, but he must have been feeling them, or he'd never have said a thing like that.

I tried to catch Trainor's eye, via the bar mirror, to pull him out of it. But his dislike was already showing in his face. He was past the extrication stage.

"You're crazy," he said, with white showing around his mouth. "Normal people aren't murderers, and you can't make them into murderers, I don't care what motive you give them! Understand me, I'm talking about cold-blooded, premeditated murderers now, like this beauty we were just hearing about. What the law recognizes as intentional, premeditated murder. Crimes of passion, committed in the heat of the moment, aren't on the carpet right now. What it takes to perpetrate a premeditated murder is a diseased mind. That's what this guy they just caught had; that's what every murderer always has. That's why normal people cannot be made into murderers, I don't care what motive you give them. Your two hypothetical men on the street, who have nothing against each other, don't even know each other, would knock your theory into a cocked hat!"

"Let's change the subject," I suggested mildly. "Murder is nothing to talk about on a lovely evening."

Neither of them paid any attention. There was a current of antagonism flowing between them that wouldn't let either one back down.

Fredericks fumbled in his inner pocket. I knew what was coming. I'd seen the gesture often enough before to know it by heart. I tried to hold his arm down, and he shook my hand off.

Out came the well-known wallet with the gold clips on each corner; down it whipped on top of the bar. Fredericks said: "I'll bet you a thousand dollars right now that any two men picked at random on the street outside can be turned into potential murderer and potential victim, by me, right while you're looking on! I'll let you do the selecting, and I'll let you name the time limit. And I'll give you any odds you want on it."

I knew Trainor's financial position. I gave him the eye across the back of Fredericks's neck. "Hundred to one shot, ten bucks," I suggested flippantly, trying to keep the thing theoretical.

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Maybe Fredericks knew Trainor's financial position too. "I don't make ten-dollar bets," he said nastily. "What are you trying to do, find an easy out for him? People that haven't the courage to back up their convictions shouldn't be so quick to air their opinions. I'll give him two to one—his thousand against two of mine. Well, how about it?" he sneered. "Are you in—or have you suddenly decided that maybe you agree with me after all?"

That was no way to put it. Trainor could have refused to have any part in the fantastic proposition, without it necessarily meaning that he retracted his opinions. But Fredericks always managed to put it in that false light. I'd seen it happen time and again. This time I happened to be the only witness, instead of the usual group, but it had the same effect as far as Trainor was concerned. If there's one thing any man detests it's seeming to back down.

"I'll take you up on that," he growled. "This is one time I'm going to show you up! It may take you down a little to lose a couple of grand, and it's certainly worth it! You've bet on a sure thing again—but for once you've picked the wrong end of it!"

Fredericks was shuffling hundred-dollar bills out of the moiré lining of his wallet. He put his empty glass down on top of them. "This says I haven't!"

Trainor said cuttingly, "I haven't that much on me. I don't usually walk around as though I expected to have to bail myself out of jail. I'll make out a check—will that be all right? Endorse it to you, if—and when."

I hadn't thought they'd go this far. "Say, listen," I protested, "you don't want to win that money, Fredericks. If you do, it means a human life's been taken. Isn't that the test?"

"We can keep it from going quite that far," he assured me. "Just so long as the *intention* to commit murder is unmistakably shown by one or the other of our two hypothetical men. We can interfere at the last minute to prevent it being carried out. But there must be no reasonable doubt. Is that satisfactory to you, Trainor?"

"Why shouldn't it be? There's absolutely no danger of things going that far—always providing these two have never seen one another before, have no long-standing grievance or bad blood between them. And to keep you from building up any grudge between them, I'm going to give you the shortest possible time: one week from tonight. This is Tuesday. Next Tuesday night, at this same time, you and I and Evans will meet here. If one of the two men whom I am about to select—with your approval—has in the meantime made an attempt to take the life of the second one, and there

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is no possible mistaking it as such, I'll endorse this check over to you. If not, that two thousand dollars is mine. And I'm sorry, but any move you make, any contact you have with these two, by way of injecting what you call a 'motive' between them, must take place in the presence of Evans and myself, or the bet is off."

"You'll both be eyewitnesses to the mechanics of the thing," Fredericks promised. Nothing will be done behind your back. There won't be any bad faith in this. We're all gentlemen, I hope."

I spoke up sourly. "I've got my doubts. You're both vultures in tuxedos, if you ask me! I keep feeling like I ate welsh rarebit before going to bed, and ought to wake up any minute. And you're as bad as he is," I added bluntly to Trainor. "I thought you had more sense. You're both a pair of bloodthirsty fools. Before you're through, you're liable to get two poor devils that never did you any harm in some kind of serious trouble, with all your theories. Why don't you both put your money away and skip the whole thing?"

They turned deaf ears to me. Trainor waved his check in the air to let it dry, then dropped it on the top of the two thousand.

Fredericks was smiling, pleased with himself, like a cat that expected to lap up a lot of easy cream. "We'll let Evans here hold the stakes."

"I won't have any part of such a dirty, underhanded bet!" I flared.

"All right, if you won't, then I'll call the barman."

He started to raise his hand. I slapped it down just in time. "What you're doing's bad enough as it is, so try to keep it to yourselves! Haven't you got any sense at all? He'll talk his head off to everyone who comes in the place. Here, give me the money, I'll hold it for you." I glanced up at the wall. "Next Tuesday at exactly midnight, one or the other of you gets it."

I had the impression Trainor was already feeling ashamed of himself, would have crawled out of it if there was any self-respecting way he could have.

"Let's get going. Pick your street corner," Fredericks said tersely.

The latter said, "The busier the corner, the higher the ratio of average men. And the busiest one I know, night or day, is the corner of Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street."

Fredericks said, "All right, let's go there. And a very good choice too. But before we start," he added, "I've got to have a single thousand-dollar bill."

"Money, eh?" I remarked. "So that's how you're going to work it."

"The root of all evil," he smiled unpleasantly. "The sure-fire motive that never missed yet, since the world began." He tried to pay for the drinks we'd had.

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"Mr. Fredericks's money is no good as far as I'm concerned," I let the barman know, without any of the joviality usually associated with that remark. "It's the wrong color." I meant it was bloody.

He took it with good grace. "Very well," he said. "Then this'll pay for three drinks in advance. See that you have 'em ready and waiting for us when we come in next Tuesday at midnight."

He hailed a cab at the door and the three of us got in. "I think I know where to get a grand-note," he remarked. A stony silence answered him. I couldn't tell whether Trainor's conscience was bothering him or he had already developed cold feet because of risking more than he could afford—maybe even more than he actually had. One thing was sure, Fredericks was the kind who would prosecute criminally if he won and that check bounced back stamped "Insufficient Funds." It was no joking matter. I happened to know that Trainor was keeping company with a certain girl, intended to marry her in the fall. His whole future, you might say, was on the dotted line of that check.

We stopped off first at a fashionable gambling place. Fredericks told us what it was, I wouldn't have known otherwise. It looked like any other swank apartment building. Well, for that matter it was, all but one certain apartment. We waited for him in the cab, as we weren't known in the place.

The minute he'd gone in, I said to Trainor, "You're not kidding me any. Can you cover that check, in case you have to endorse it next Tuesday night?"

"I won't have to endorse it next Tuesday night. I'm winning this little pot."

"That doesn't answer my question! Nothing's sure, and this setup depends on the human equation, the most doubtful quantity there is. Well—have you got a thousand dollars?"

"I can just about raise it if I have to," he admitted glumly, "by hocking my shirt and borrowing on my salary."

"I thought so! You ought to have your head examined!" I took the check out of my wallet. "Here, take this back while you've still got the chance. I'll tell him the whole thing's off."

"You open your mouth to him about what I just told you," he warned in a cold rage, "and I'll punch your head in. D'you think I'd crawl to him, go begging for leniency? He'd rub it in every time he met me, never let me forget it. I'm going to take that two thousand of his and smear it all over his kisser, to show him what I think of him!"

I saw there was nothing I could do to dissuade him. "That's sure an expensive way of expressing an opinion," was all I said.

Fredericks came back again with

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a thousand-dollar bill they'd given him in exchange for ten hundreds.

"Now let's get the ground-work laid. 42nd Street and Seventh," he told the driver, "northwest corner."

He showed it to us in the cab, by the flame of his cigar lighter. It was new, crisp as lettuce. Notes that big don't pass from hand to hand much, I guess. "You sure it's not fake?" I couldn't help asking. "That'd be a nice ironic twist—bring two people to the verge of murder over a phony bill."

"It's as good as if I got it at a bank."

"How you going to work it?" Trainor wanted to know coldly.

"I'll show you. Watch this." He folded it nearly in half, edge to edge, and carefully creased it by running his fingers back and forth over it. He took out a gold cigar-cutter, inserted the blade under the crease, and carefully severed the bill into two equal parts. "It's valueless this way, isn't it?" he told us. "There's your motive right there. Two different people, each one gets half. Neither half's worth anything without the other. Neither one will give up his half. A deadlock. Whichever one is the more aggressive and daring of the two will do something about it. That spells murder. Maybe both will at once. Tonight we plant the first half, with whoever Trainor here selects. You follow him, Evans, and get his name and address and all about him for the record. Tomorrow night, same time and place, we plant the second half. Then we make known to each party the identity of the other, who is all that is standing between him and a neat little windfall. Then you'll see Nature take its course. And *you say,*" he sneered at Trainor, "that you can't make a murderer out of any chance passerby on a street corner! Well, watch, between now and next Tuesday night—and learn something!"

"It's a filthy scheme," I said. "Treating human beings like flies stuck on a pin! You're going to start something that you won't be able to stop in time, mark my words! There'll be blood on both your heads."

Our driver coasted down past the Rialto Theater entrance, looked around questioningly.

"How long are you allowed to park here?" Fredericks asked him.

"I ain't allowed to park here at all. I can park around on the 42nd Street side with you, though, just past the corner, if I don't stay too long."

"That'll be all right. We'd better stay in the cab," he said to us in an undertone. "If we stand out on the sidewalk in full sight, it mayn't work. Pick someone coming from that direction, 8th Avenue, so we can see him before he gets here."

We braked to a stop alongside the curb. That particular stretch of sidewalk is plenty bright, any time

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of the night. In addition, there was a street light just far enough ahead to give us a sort of preview of anyone who passed under it coming our way. We all three had good eyes. It was anything but deserted even at this hour, but the passersby were spaced now, not coming along in droves.

Trainor sat peering intently ahead through the partly opened cab door. "I suppose," Fredericks observed drily, "you'll make every effort to pick someone who looks prosperous enough not to need a thousand dollars badly enough to kill for it."

"Not at all," snapped Trainor. "I'm not loading the dice. I'm here to pick an average man. And the average man on the street hasn't very much money. But neither does he kill for what he hasn't got."

"You'll find out," was the purring answer.

There was a long wait, while people drifted by, by ones and twos and threes, but mostly by ones. I kept thinking, contemptuously and yet a little admiringly too, "Every cent he's got in the world risked on the imponderable reactions of some chance passerby out there. It must be great to have that much confidence in your fellow-men."

"See anyone that looks average enough yet? You're hard to please," mocked Fredericks softly.

Trainor said, "If I'm any good at reading faces, the last few that have gone by would cheerfully cut anyone's throat for a toothpick, let alone a thousand bucks. I wouldn't call these Broadway lizards an average man, would you?" Then he said suddenly, "Here's someone now—quick! This fellow walking along near the outer edge of the sidewalk."

I just had time for a quick, comprehensive glimpse of the candidate as he passed under the street light. Trainor was a good picker. The guy was so average he would have been invisible in a crowd. Clothes, face, everything were commonplace. You couldn't feature him killing anyone, or doing anything but just breathing all his life long. Fredericks tossed the half-bill out of the cab window.

He came abreast a minute later, missed seeing it, went on his way. That was in character too, the type nothing ever happened to, even when it was thrust right at his feet.

Fredericks snapped his fingers, swore, stepped out, and picked up the half bill. The three of us laughed a little, nervously. We were all under a strain.

Another wait. "All right, this one, then," Trainor said abruptly. "He looks decent and harmless enough." Again one of those colorless "supers" of the New York mob-scene.

Fredericks flipped his wrist again, and the bait fell out. Again

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it missed fire. The pedestrian looked down, saw it, went a step beyond, turned, came back, and picked it up. He stood looking at it, turning it over from side to side, while we held our breaths, hidden in the cab, close enough to have reached out and touched him. I could see a skeptical frown on his face. Finally he deliberately threw it away again, brushed his hands, and went on his way.

"Suspicious," Fredericks catalogued him drily. "Thinks it's too good to be true, there must be a catch to it. Queer money, or some advertising scheme. Typical New Yorker for you."

He retrieved it a second time. This human-interest byplay, though, had managed to dull my objections to the scheme, made me overlook its dark implications for a while. When people acted so naturally, so comically even, as these passersby, there didn't seem to be much risk of getting them to kill one another, as Fredericks insisted. It was like watching frisky half-grown jungle cats at play with one another inside a zoo, and forgetting they have claws.

Trainor went on scrutinizing everyone that came along singly. "Here's some—" he started to say, then checked himself. "No, he's had a drink, that doesn't make for normalcy."

After that, there was a complete cessation of motion on the street for a minute or two, as sometimes happens on even the busiest thoroughfares. As though activity were being fed to it on a belt, and there had been a temporary break in it.

Then a figure came into sight. His isolation gave Trainor a good chance to size him up without distraction. I had a feeling he was going to finger him, even before he did. I think I would have myself. A quick snapshot of him, under the light, showed a fellow of medium height, stocky build, high cheekbones, dressed in a tidy but not expensive gray suit.

"This is the ticket," Trainor said decisively.

Fredericks skimmed the bait out and a ghost of a breeze carried it a little farther away from the cab than before.

The man picked it up, scratched the back of his neck. Then he looked all around him, as though wondering how it could have got there. He glanced once at the cab, searchingly, but we were flattened back out of sight in the dark interior. He evidently took it for an empty one waiting for a fare and didn't look a second time.

It took him a good four or five minutes to decide the second half of the bill wasn't lying around anywhere. What made him desist, chiefly, was an unwelcome offer of help from a second passerby.

"Lose something, bud?"

"Mind your own business!" was the retort.

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Fredericks breathed in the direction of my ear, "Trainor's average man is pugnacious. You mean he won't kill for the other half of that?"

"That's just Manhattan manners," Trainor contradicted.

Our man moved away with what he'd found, receding toward the 7th Avenue corner. Watching through the back window of the cab, we saw him stop at the curb, glance back at where he'd found the unlikely token, as if he still couldn't get over it. Then he crossed to the Times Building "island," skirted that, and crossed Broadway.

"There's one half of our murder team," Fredericks said. "Whether he turns out to be the murderer or the victim, depends on how aggressive the party of the second part is. All right, Evans, go after him, keep him in sight. Find out his name, where he lives, all about him—only don't accost him yourself, of course. It may make him leery."

I opened the cab door, stepped out, and started briskly out after our unsuspecting guinea pig. "Fine thing to turn into," I thought. "A private detective!"

It was easy to keep him in sight, because of the sparsity of other pedestrians. In the daytime he'd have been swallowed up in a minute in this teeming part of the city. He kept going straight east along 42nd and made for the 6th Avenue El. When I saw him start up the stairs to the platform I had to close in on him, as a train might have come along and separated us before I could get there.

I passed through the turnstile right behind him, and when the train came in, I got in the same car. He sat on one of the side seats, giving me the opportunity of keeping him in sight from behind without his being aware of it. At one point, I could tell by the downward tilt of his head that he had taken the severed bill out again and was studying it under the car lights. He evidently couldn't quite make up his mind whether it was genuine or not. He looked around to see if anyone had been watching, then put it away again.

He straightened and walked out at the 99th Street Station. I left by the opposite end of the car, to avoid being too noticeable. I gave him a headstart by pretending to stop and tie a shoe lace, so I wouldn't be treading on his heels.

He plunged from the stair-shed straight into a bar. So he wasn't going to any bank to verify its genuineness. He was going to put it up to that Solomon of the lowly, the saloon-keeper. I suppose a professional sleuth would have stayed outside, to attract as little attention to himself as possible. I was no professional, however, and I had no great hankering to hang around on a street corner in that strange neighborhood waiting for him to

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come out again. I barged right in after him.

It seemed the right move to have made. It was within an hour of closing time, and the two of us were the only customers. It was an empty barn of a place with excellent acoustics; you couldn't whisper if you tried. I was just in time to hear the barman boom out sociably: "'Lo, there, Casey, where've you been keeping yourself?" So that gave me his name.

I had a beer and became very interested in the slot machine, to give myself something to do; but I timed the noise so it wouldn't interfere with their husky undertones.

"Where'd you find it?" The barman was holding it up to the light, shutting one eye at it. I got that in the machine mirror.

Then after he had been told, and the inevitable question had been put to him, "I nivver saw them that big before, but it looks rail to me."

"But waddya suppose it's cut in two like that for? 'Tis no tear, it's a clane-cut edge."

Casey's bosom friend in the white apron was doing some mental double-crossing. I could read it on his face in the mirror. Or maybe he just thought it would look nice framed on his wall. "I'll stand ye a drink for it!" he offered with sudden fake heartiness.

I started to get uneasy. I hadn't bargained on the thing passing from hand to hand all over town. I made up my mind, "If Casey parts with it, I spill the beans to the two of them right now!"

But Casey wasn't parting with it that easy. The barkeep's argument that it was unredeemable, no good, not worth a cent as it was, fell on deaf ears. The ante rose to fifty cents, then a dollar, finally a bottle of rye. Casey stalked out with the parting shot, "I'll kape it. Who can tell, I might come acrosth the other part of it yet."

"Ouch!" I said to myself. "You're going to, before the week's out. Then what?"

On an impulse, I stayed behind instead of following him. The cagier way to find out everything about him was to remain behind, at this fountainhead of gossip, instead of tracking him home through the deserted streets.

The barman drifted over, brought the subject up himself. "That fellow just in here found half a thousand-dollar bill on 42nd Street."

I showed proper astonishment. "Yeah? Who is he?"

"Name of John Casey. He comes in here all the time. Lives right around the corner, the brownstone house, second from corner of 99th. He's an electrician's helper." Not all at once like that, of course. I spaced my questions, making them those of a man obligingly keeping up his end of a conversation in which he has no real interest.

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"He'll take me up on it yet," he wound up. "As soon as he finds out it's no good, he'll be glad to take me up on it." But there was a glint in his piggy eyes—as though if Casey didn't, he'd do something about it himself.

I went out of there telling myself, "Brother, if you're this steamed up about *half* a bill, what you won't do when you find out who has the other half!"

Trainor's thousand looked as good as gone. There was certainly going to be a murder somewhere within this triangle before the week was out. And no matter who committed it—the barman or Casey or tomorrow night's unknown finder—Fredericks would be the actual murderer. And Trainor and I would be the accessories.

If I'd been dealing with a square guy, I might have persuaded him to drop it, after what I told him next day. There would have still been plenty time enough. But I found out how skunkish he was when I put it up to him. Trainor of course was present.

"The bet isn't with you," he told me. "If Trainor wants to call it off—because he can't possibly win—I'll play ball with him. All he has to do is refund me the thousand dollars, the amount of the bill I sacrificed. Are you ready to do that, Trainor?"

Trainor just looked at me and I looked at him, and the three of us went back to 42nd Street and 7th Avenue. Somebody's death warrant had been signed—possibly that avaricious barman's. More likely Casey's. Most likely still, somebody we hadn't even set eyes on so far, somebody walking unsuspectingly along the midnight streets at this very moment. It gave me the creeps. I hated Fredericks—and I almost hated Trainor too. Too stubborn to back down. Playing the gods of the machine. Thinking they'd be able to stop it in time.

We were in a cab again, almost over the same spot as the night before. It happened quicker this time. For one thing, it was drizzling lightly and there were far fewer people passing. There were no trials and errors like the night before. Trainor bided his time, made his choice carefully. He had to be careful whom he pitted against Casey, for his own sake, and he knew it. He'd gone a little wrong on Casey. His answer to the man that had asked him if he'd lost anything, and what had occurred in the barroom, showed that Casey had a well-developed streak of stubbornness in him, that might easily turn into pugnacity. Trainor had to be careful whom he matched against him now.

Presently a reedy-looking individual, coat collar turned up against the rain, came shambling along. Probably the weather and the turned-up collar and his soggy hatbrim made him look more dejected

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than he was. A single glance, as they come walking down a street, is no way to judge character, anyway. But his face was wan, and whatever his inner disposition, he looked frail enough to be harmless.

"Drop it," signaled Trainor under his breath. The second half bill fell on the gleaming sidewalk.

I couldn't help feeling I was looking at a dead man, as he came on toward us, so unaware. Almost wanted to yell out to him in frantic warning, "Don't pick anything up from the sidewalk, whatever you do, or you're a goner!"

He saw it and he stopped in his tracks. He brought it up to face level. His mouth dropped open. We were so close we could even hear what he muttered. "Holy smoke!" he said hoarsely, and pushed his water-waved hat to the back of his head.

He stood there a long time, looking stunned. He went on uncertainly after a while, and the mist started to veil his figure.

"Hurry up, before you lose him," Fredericks said, and unlatched the door for me.

"Why do I have to do all the dirty work in this?" I grunted, stepping out.

"Because you have no stake in it. Not to put too fine a point on it, Trainor doesn't altogether trust me, and I'm not sure I altogether trust him. We both trust you implicitly. You're the contact man."

"Malarkey!" I growled, and belted up my raincoat. The taxi went one way, I went the other after my quarry.

This time instead of beer I had to sit drinking vile coffee in a cheap cafeteria, while he took the bill out from time to time and studied it surreptitiously across the room from me.

"Planning what you'd like to get with it, if it was only whole," I thought pityingly. "Little knowing what you're *likely* to get, because of it."

I could see him day-dreaming there under the lights. I could almost see the girl and the bungalow and the television set in his eyes.

"Damn Trainor!" I seethed. "Damn Fredericks!" Why didn't they drop a whole bill with no murder strings attached, and make someone happy! One thing was sure, if there was going to be any killing in this, it wouldn't be through him. You could read goodness in his face. Trainor had shown rare judgment in his choice this time.

I followed him home through the rain at two that morning, and if his thoughts hadn't been so preoccupied with what he'd found, I'm sure he would have caught on easily enough. The jaunty cut of the raincoat and the rustling noise it made, were too easy to notice. But he was walking on air. A troop of elephants could have fol-

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lowed him and he wouldn't have known it.

He went home to a little hole-in-the-wall flat in the Chelsea part of town, and me twenty yards behind him. And then I was in for a bad jolt! He had his own key, so I couldn't get his name from the mailboxes in the grubby little foyer. To avoid having to come around the next day and ask questions of the janitor, I deliberately went up the inner stairs after him (the street door was unlocked) to ascertain what his flat number was in that way, if I could. I heard a door on the third floor close after him, and when I got up to the landing it was 25, since that was the only one had voices coming from inside it. You could hear everything out there where I was.

I heard a kiss, and a solicitous voice asked, "Tired, dear?" Then he told her about what he'd found, and they stood there just the other side of the door, planning what they could have done with it if it had only been whole.

"Maybe," she suggested, "if you take it around to the bank, they'd give you something on it in partial redemption, a hundred or even fifty. Even that would be a God-send!"

Then an infant started whimpering somewhere in the back of the flat, and I crept downstairs again all choked up. Married, and with a young baby! It was inhuman to torture people like that. And to place them in danger of being murdered was bestial.

25, the mailbox said, was rented by Noble Dreyer.

I jotted the name and address down. I said, as I went out into the wet again, "Well, Dreyer, you don't know it, but I'm your guardian angel from now on."

I met Fredericks and Trainor by appointment at the former's club, at cocktail time next afternoon. I had very little to say, only "The guy's name is Noble Dreyer." And I gave them the address. I didn't mention the wife, I didn't mention the kid, I didn't mention the guardian angel.

Fredericks said, with about as much emotion as an oyster, "Good. Now all that remains is to inform the two parties of one another's existence and whereabouts, and the test is under way."

We followed him into the club's writing room, and he sat down and addressed two envelopes, one to Casey, 99th Street, the other to Dreyer, 24th Street. Then he put them aside and wrote two identical notes, on club stationery.

The other half of what you picked up at 7th Avenue and 42nd Street is at this moment in the possession of (he inserted Casey's name and address on one, Dreyer's on the other). *He found it the same way you did yours. You have as much*

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right to the whole bill as he has!

The come-on, of course, was that last sentence. It was an invitation to murder if there ever was one. But Trainor made no objection. "The average, decent, normal man," he said, "will not be incited to murder even by getting information like this. He'll envy maybe, or even try to strike a bargain with his co-holder, but he won't kill."

Was Trainor right?

Fredericks left the notes unsigned, of course. He blotted, them folded each one over. I was holding the two addressed envelopes in my hand. "I'll seal them for you," I said quietly and took them from him before he could object. I put each one in an envelope, moistened and closed the flap, and sent for the steward for stamps. "Mail these for Mr. Fredericks," I said.

Then I took a good long drink, and I felt better than I'd felt since the devilish bet had been made.

"That's that," Fredericks said, gleefully, rubbing his hands. "Now, of course, we must be ready with some sort of preventive measure, or at least some form of supervision, to keep them from going whole hog. Although I don't suppose you two'll give me credit for it, I don't want either of them to lose their lives—if I can help it."

The way he said that burned me up, as if he were talking about some form of insect life. "Oh, no-o, of course not," I drawled, "it's all just in the spirit of good clean fun. And now, what precaution do you propose taking? Sending them each a bullet-proof vest? Or maybe just a rabbit's foot will do."

I smiled tightly.

He'd never had much sense of humor. "The idea will take a while to ferment," he said seriously. "Premeditated murder always does. Probably nothing much will happen for a day or two, while they digest the thought that the other half bill is theirs for the taking. Suppose Trainor and I keep an eye on this Dreyer, and you sort of stay close to our friend Casey. That way we can keep one another posted, the minute an overt move gets under way. Just give them rope enough to leave no doubt of their intentions, but be prepared to step in before the act is carried out. It shouldn't be necessary to drag the police in at any time. The mere knowledge that three outsiders have read their minds and know what's going on should be enough to scotch the inclination once and for all. Nobody commits murder before an audience."

Trainor said, "I want one thing understood. I want positive evidence of murderous intent on the part of either one of them before I'll consent to your claiming the money. I won't have you jumping to the conclusion that just because Casey, let's say, sets out to look up Dreyer, he's going to take his

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life. If he goes there with a weapon, that's another matter; you've won the bet. If he doesn't, you haven't proved anything. There's nothing more normal than for him to seek out the other man, try to come to some agreement with him, or even just talk the thing over with him out of curiosity. I want *proof* of murderous intention, and, my friend, many a prosecutor has found out that's the hardest thing there is to get!"

He could have saved his breath. I could have told both of them I didn't think there was much chance of Casey or Dreyer approaching one another at all within the next few days. But I didn't. They might have asked me why I was so sure, and I was in no position to answer. Ethically, I wasn't troubled in the slightest. In reality the bet would end in a stalemate. In appearance, it would be decided in Trainor's favor. That was all to the good. He could use that two thousand better than Fredericks.

This was Thursday evening. They wouldn't get the notes Fredericks had sent them until Friday morning, so there was no reason to start keeping an eye on them until Friday evening. Since they both worked daytimes—Dreyer as manager of a chain grocery store—it was only after working hours that they needed to be kept under observation.

I may have felt privately that there was no reason for it even then, but I went through with it for form's sake. We established, as points of contact by which to get in touch with one another in case of necessity, the saloon Casey frequented and an all-night drug store on the corner below Dreyer's flat. They were to call me or I was to call them, if anything got under way at either end that required quick action.

The wear and tear was pretty bad at my end, because of the quantities of beer I had to keep drinking to "pay my rent." The place was fairly well-filled up to about midnight, then the customers thinned until there finally remained only Casey and myself. He had been in there from eight on. I was obsessed with the slot machine again.

It was the barkeep who brought up the subject, after maneuvering his barcloth around for a while. "Still got that thousand-dollar scrap ye found?" he asked, sleepy-lidded.

"Yeah, but not on me, don't worry," was the shrewd answer.

"What'd you do, put it in the bank?" asked the barman, scornfully.

"I tried to turn it in there, but they wouldn't take it," Casey admitted.

"What'd I tell ye! Why don't you listen to reason? I'll give you two bottles of rye for it, you pick the brand."

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"If it's no good, what do you want it so bad for?" Casey asked, not unreasonably.

The white-aproned one tripped slightly over the answer. "I want it for a curayosity. Sure, what else would I be wanting it for?"

"Well, I'm hanging onto it, now more than ever! Take a look at this. It was in my mailbox when I left the house this morning." I recognized the note Fredericks had sent him.

The barman bent over the counter, laboriously read it through with lip motions. "Hunh," he said, "this must be meant for someone else. It's got your own name down. What would they be telling you you found it for? You know that already."

"It got in the wrong envelope," Casey said angrily, like a man who's been cheated. "They must have sent one to somebody else, and I got his by mistake, worse luck! Anyway, it shows there's another half to the bill. Somebody picked it up just like I did, so I'm keeping mine."

The barkeeper scratched his chin. "I'd be careful, Casey," he said with friendly concern. "Have you got it in a good place? Somebody might try to take it away from you."

"Let 'em try!" said Casey belligerently. "I've got it stuck away good, no fear. They'll not get their hands on it in a hurry!"

The barman swatted a fly with his cloth. "I wouldn't carry it around with me or anything like that, if I was you," he advised by way of finding out.

"Don't worry, I've got it hidden in my room, where no one'll find it."

"Have ye, now?" The barman scratched his sandpapery jaw some more. "Have another, Casey," he offered amiably. "This is on the house." I made a point of carefully watching his hands as he drew the suds, but he didn't try anything, just filled the glass, knocked its head off, set it up. Then he sort of drifted to the back, by easy stages. There was a telephone on the wall, just outside the washroom door. I watched him fiddling around with it, dusting off the dial slots. Who ever heard of anyone dusting off a telephone at that hour of the morning? He looked around to see if either of us was looking. Casey was squatting down, playing with the tavern cat, I'd just put my fiftieth coin into the slot machine.

A bell jingled back there, and then the barman fiddled around some more with the dial slots. You couldn't hear what he said, through his funneled hand. Then he came back again up the bar by easy stages. Nice pleasant tarantula, he was.

Three beers later a couple of hard-looking customers came in. "Now, isn't that a coincidence!" I said to myself. The barman didn't make any further attempts to de-

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tain Casey after that. He floundered out, and the two hard-looking customers went after him as promptly as a tail following a kite.

They turned in after Casey at the dismal-looking 99th Street tenement entrance, and I did likewise. There was a cautious creaking coming from somewhere above on the stairs. I put my foot on the bottom step, and suddenly a shadow detached itself from the wall. The side of my face exploded, and it felt like the whole roof had fallen down on top of me. I grabbed at a leg, going down, folded it over my chest, and brought him down after me. A lot of noisy kicking and threshing went on all over the dirty hallway. It served its purpose. Even on 99th Street sounds of combat don't belong inside houses. Doors began to open here and there on the floors above.

Somebody came down off the stairs in a hurry, jumped over the two of us, and made for the street, with a grunted admonition, "Beat it, Patsy, the whole house is awake!" Patsy tore himself from my embrace, stood up, kicked out viciously in the direction of my head, then scampered out. Upstairs on one of the landings Casey was howling belligerently: "Come back and fight like a man, ye dirty snaik-thief, whoever ye are!"

It sounded as if he still had his thousand-dollar bill which was all that really interested me. I picked myself up, then slipped away to avoid meeting the riot squad. So much for Friday night.

Saturday, at cocktail time, Fredericks was already acting a little less sure of himself. Even slightly worried, you might say. I told them what had happened, with just a slight distortion of the facts. I let them think I'd watched Casey put the two thugs to rout from across the street, instead of actually entering the building and taking a hand in it myself, so to speak.

Fredericks said, "That's all right, but what I can't understand is why neither Casey nor Dreyer has made a move toward one another. They've had nearly forty-eight hours now to think it over. We know that they both got the notes I sent. Dreyer's a spineless jellyfish, he'll dream and plan with his wife, but he won't do anything about it. And she's one of these goody-goodies herself—which is your luck, Trainor. I've really been counting on this Casey fellow, but he seems to be more inclined to passive resistance than aggression. Maybe," he said hopefully, "he's got the idea already, and it's taking time to cook. If he doesn't do something about it before Tuesday night, I'm out two grand!"

Saturday night was a big night at the tavern. I took a chance and went back, even after what had happened the night before in Casey's hallway. I felt pretty sure

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the two footpads wouldn't show their faces there, and they didn't. I stayed fairly close to the door, however, to reduce the risk of being ganged up on.

Casey, however, did show up as though too dense to connect the attempt on him with his friend the bartender. Or maybe not so dense as he let on. When the crowd thinned out and he had the latter's undivided attention, he related what had happened.

The barkeep was all innocent surprise. "And ye think 'twas that they were after, the thing ye found?"

"Think? I know damn well it was! I don't mind telling you I've got myself a gun, and the next party that tries to break in my room like that is going to be a sorry man!" And he turned around and went out again, without saying good night.

Sunday night Casey took no chances. He brought a bottle up to his room with him and stayed in close to his mutilated treasure, keeping an eye on it. I could see a dim light burning in his window from where I watched, pacing back and forth between corners on the opposite side of the street. I didn't knock off until 4 A. M., when the lights went out in the *Lucky Shamrock* and I saw the bartender come out, lock up, and go home. He was alone, and he steered clear of Casey's flat, so I figured the latter's gun-talk had had a salutary effect. Everything was peaceful and under control; Sunday seemed to be everyone's night of rest, the way it should be. I went home grumbling to myself about not being cut out for a night watchman.

Monday night was the last full night left. If anything was going to happen, it was then or never. That being the case, I was on the job early. The electrical repair shop in which Casey worked closed up about 10:30. He stopped off for something to eat, and then went straight up to his room again—without any bottle this time. Probably still had some left in last night's. I girded myself for a long vigil.

At eleven a messenger boy showed up and went in the building. It struck me as odd for a moment that anyone living in a dump like that should be on the receiving end of a telegram, but I didn't think twice about it. The lad came out again, and almost immediately the light went out behind Casey's window. A moment later he showed up at the street door. The message had unmistakably been for him. I saw him stop under a streetlight and read it over a second time, as if it puzzled him. Then he went on his way.

I had no choice but to tail him, and after the number of times he'd seen me in the *Shamrock*, it was no

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easy matter. I had to stay completely out of sight and yet not lose him. Luckily he didn't ride to his destination, but went on foot. He walked a vast distance down Broadway to a certain well-lighted corner, then abruptly stopped there and went no farther, as if expecting to meet someone.

I shrank back behind a protruding showcase just in time and watched him without sticking my nose too far out. He took the telegram out, read it for the third time, looked up at the nearest street sign as if to verify the location, then nodded to himself.

Fifteen, twenty minutes went by. He began to get more and more impatient, turning his head this way and that, shifting his feet. I could see him getting more and more angry by the minute. Finally he blew up altogether, balled the message up, slung it viciously away from him, stuck his hands in his pockets, and started back the way he'd come.

"Good work, boy," I commended. "I've been dying to get a look at that myself!" I turned around and studied necktie patterns in the case until he'd gone by, then went over, picked it up, and smoothed it out.

JOHN CASEY,
1107 99TH STREET.

ON RECEIPT OF THIS GO TO NORTHEAST CORNER BROADWAY AND 67 STREET YOU WILL RECEIVE VALUABLE INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER HALF BILL.

A FRIEND.

"A stall!" I thought. "And the fool fell for it—went out and left the bill unguarded in his room! I bet it's gone by now!"

That tricky barman must have engineered it, of course. But after all, what did I care whether he'd lost it or not? If the stunt had worked, at least it had worked without the aid of murder; so Trainor's money was safe, and Dreyer was safe too. Those were the only two angles I was interested in.

A belated suspicion of what was up must have dawned on Casey himself on his way back. He walked so fast that I never quite caught up with him after he left that corner. But I knew where he was headed, so it didn't trouble me.

The light was shining silverly in his room when I turned down 99th Street again. For just one moment more the street clung to its slumbering serenity, then it came to life right before my eyes. The thing itself must have been over already, must have happened just before I turned the corner.

Whole rows of windows lighted up suddenly in Casey's building and heads were stuck out. A patrol car was already shrieking up the nearest avenue. It rocketed around the corner, dove at the building

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entrance as if it were going to crash its way into the hallway. Just before it got there, a figure came tearing out, saw it, swerved, and bolted up the other way. Some woman or other helpfully brayed down from one of the open windows, "Stop that man! Stop him! He just shot somebody!"

The figure threw something away as it ran, and there was a metallic impact from an ashcan. A cop took a jump from the prowl car, fired warningly into the air, yelled something. The second shot wasn't into the the air. The figure went on, leaned over too far, finally slumped down flat, then rolled over on its back.

It was Casey.

An ambulance showed up with wailing siren and screeched to a stop. Casey was shoved into it with a busted kneecap. But the other figure that was carried out to it under a sheet didn't have a move left in it. I tried to edge in and get a look, and was nearly knocked down for my pains.

"He's dead," I was told.

I backed out.

Well, if he was, that was all that mattered. I'd done my best, but Trainor's thousand had gone up the flue and he was behind the eight ball now. At least nothing had happened to that poor cuss with the wife and baby.

"How'd it happen?" I asked one of the neighbors standing next to me.

"He came home and caught somebody in his room. I passed two suspicious-looking characters on the stairs myself when I came home earlier. The other one must've got away over the roof."

I'd figured that the slimy bartender had been at the bottom of it all along. This proved it. It must have been the same two hoods as the first time.

I was the first one to get to 22 Club the next night. I had the check and Fredericks's cash with me, to turn over to him. I got there about ten to twelve, and wondered how Trainor was going to take it. He came in alone about five minutes later. I could tell by his face he didn't know yet, thought he was coming into two thousand bucks. I decided not to tell him until Fredericks had showed up; spare him the ax until the last minute.

"Well," he said, "Mr. Wise Guy is going to be twice as sick at having to eat crow."

The barman had a good memory. He parked the three drinks ordered the week before in a row before us.

"What do you mean, twice as sick?" I asked.

"Oh, he got a cramp or something last night, went home to bed about eleven, and left me holding down the sidewalk there in front of Dreyer's."

The minute-hand of the clock

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hit twelve. I said, "I'm going to call his club, find out what's holding him up."

Trainor said maliciously, "Ask him if he's afraid to face the music."

I was at the phone a long time. When I came back Trainor could read on my face that I had bad news for him. I took out the check and the twenty hundreds and laid them on the bar. "Well," I said, "it looks like he won the bet after all. He *did* cause someone to be murdered by someone else, like he said he could."

Trainor's mouth just dropped open, and his face went sick.

I picked up his check and started to tear it up into small pieces. "But there doesn't seem to be anyone to collect it for him. That was Fredericks who was shot dead in Casey's room on 99th Street last night. They couldn't identify him until late this afternoon. He went there to doublecross us. Maybe to make sure Casey learned who had the other half. It must have been already missing—the bartender's two side-kicks got there first and swiped it, and Casey shot Fredericks down in cold blood believing *he* took it."

Trainor picked up the third drink and spilled it slowly out on the floor. Then he turned the glass upside down on the bar with a knell-like sound. He said, without any bitterness now, "They always said he'd bet only on a sure thing. Well, he lived up to his name, all right!"

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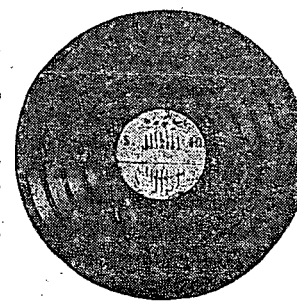

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